



## **SISYPHUS, CĀMUS, AND THE MAD MAN OF NARANATH :**

### **A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF THE MYTH OF THE SHAMELESS STONE**

Along with Ixion and Tantalus, Sisyphus is held up in Greek mythology as an instance of the exemplary punishment meted out by the gods to those who displease them. The myth of Sisyphus has many complex layers in it, but the central feature is that he was condemned to the eternal punishment of having to roll a rock up the slope of a hill, only to see it topple down as it got close to the top. Robert Graves's account of the myth is as follows :

It may have been because he had injured Salmoneus, or because he had always lived by robbery and often murdered unsuspecting travellers—some say that it was Theseus who put an end to Sisyphus' career, though this is not generally mentioned among Theseus' feats—at any rate, Sisyphus was given an exemplary punishment. The Judges of the Dead showed him a huge block of stone—identical in size with that into which Zeus had turned himself when fleeing from Aeopos—and ordered him to roll it up the brow of a hill and topple it down the farther slope. He has never yet succeeded in doing so. As soon as he has almost reached the summit, he is forced back by the weight of the shameless stone, which bounces to the very bottom once more; where he wearily retrieves it and must begin all over again, though sweat bathes his limbs, and a cloud of dust rises above his head.<sup>1</sup>

As sources for the various legends associated with this myth, Graves mentions Apollodorus, Pausanias, Servius, Hyginus, Polyaenus, Sophocles, Scholiast, Ovid, Homer, Tzetzes, Horace, Theognis, and Eumelus. This means that the myth of Sisyphus had drawn the attention of a sizable number of the ancients, and had undergone various stages of evolution resulting in numerous versions, Albert Camus,



while discussing the symbolic significance of this myth, identifies in particular two of the many explanations for Sisyphus' punishment. One of these relates to how Sisyphus provoked the wrath of Zeus. Here is Camus's version of it :

'Opinions differ as to the reasons why he became the futile labourer of the underworld. To begin with, he is accused of a certain levity in regard to the gods. He stole their secrets. Aegina, the daughter of Aesopus, was carried off by Jupiter. The father was shocked by that disappearance and complained to Sisyphus. He, who knew of the abduction, offered to tell about it on condition that Aesopus would give water to the citadel of Corinth. To the celestial thunderbolts he preferred the benediction of water. He was punished for this in the underworld. Homer tells us also that Sisyphus had put Death in chains. Pluto could not endure the sight of his deserted, silent empire. He dispatched the god of war who liberated Death from the hands of the conqueror.'

The other explanation why Sisyphus was subjected to the eternal punishment brings in a note of humour in this otherwise grim and tragic story of crime and punishment. Camus has recounted this also :

It is also said that Sisyphus, being near to death, rashly wanted to test his wife's love. He ordered her to cast his unburied body into the middle of the public square. Sisyphus woke up in the underworld. And there, annoyed by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained from Pluto permission to return to earth in order to chastise his wife. But when he had seen again the face of this world, enjoyed water and sun, warm stones and the sea, he no longer wanted to go back to the infernal darkness. Recalls, signs of anger, warnings were of no avail. Many years more, he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth. A decree of the gods was necessary. Mercury came and seized the impudent man by the collar and, snatching him from his joys, led him forcibly back to the underworld where his rock was ready for him.'

These circumstances in the myth of Sisyphus enable Camus to build up a theory of the absurd. He lets his imagination breathe life into the myth. What seem to interest Camus here are :

- a. Sisyphus *is*, and he exists because of his passions ;
- b. He has to pay the price of his earthly passions ;
- c. "A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself."
- d. When Sisyphus walks down to take the stone again, it is a period of pause, an hour of consciousness ; this consciousness helps him to become superior to his fate,

- e. There is a certain happiness in this awareness of the situation (This takes us very close to W.B. Yeats's observation that Hamlet and Lear are gay).

Germaine Brée considers Sisyphus to represent only an early phase of Camus's career. She contrasts it with the figure of Prometheus, the mythical hero dominating the thought of Camus's later work *The Rebel*. "Prometheus," says Brée, "came to symbolize man's revolt against the limits imposed upon him by nature ; chained to his rock, proudly refusing to accept Zeus' justice, he might, at first thought, seem perfectly to incarnate *l'homme absurde* as he is described in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.... Camus prefers at first the figure of Sisyphus, for he wants us to imagine *l'homme absurde* as happy. Prometheus is not a happy hero, and in this respect Sisyphus is to a certain extent anti-Promethean. In the years following 1943, "the winter of the world", Camus often alludes to Prometheus, but to a Prometheus who has travelled a long way from Greek mythology and whose modern reincarnation he evokes in *L'Homme Révolte*." <sup>4</sup> Brée is also of the view that Camus was never an existentialist, and that he has always been quite opposed to it. Thus she distinguishes Camus's concept of the absurd from that of Sartre and others. Three possible meanings are identified by her, viz. (a) Life is incomprehensible ; (b) Life is meaningless ; and (c) Life is not worth living. Camus's view, according to Brée, is that life "is both absurd and, for each of us, infinitely valuable." Brée is eager to point out that *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is the work of a young man.

A less sympathetic critic, Rayner Heppenstall finds Camus's philosophical leanings quite unbecoming of a young man who had been an active resistance worker during the war. Heppenstall says, "In his two plays and in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he conducted some of the most sterile and unprofitable investigation that can be imagined, taking up, moreover, a point of view which made nonsense of his activities as a resistance journalist." <sup>5</sup> Heppenstall criticizes Camus for not giving adequate evidence for his generalizations. "*The Myth of Sisyphus*," he says, "is an oddly constructed book. It states briefly why, in its author's opinion, the world is meaningless, irrational and absurd. It is necessary, says Camus, nevertheless to live out this life and not commit suicide. He then takes the epithet 'absurd' and systematically transfers it to those who endure lucidly, heroically and

prototypically in this way. The absurd heroes who figure in Camus's pantheon are Don Juan, the actor, the conqueror, the creative artist, Kirilov in *The Possessed*, Sisyphus himself, who was condemned by the gods to roll a stone for ever up a hill, and (in later editions) K. and Josef K. in the novels of Franz Kafka. The characteristics of these prototypical heroes and the nature of their absurd response to the world are catalogued with rather more reticence than those which Carlyle discovered in a work of comparable aim." Heppenstall sees only "naive realism" in Camus; he does not accept even Sartre's description of Camus as a "classical pessimist". "Doctor Johnson," writes Heppenstall, "kicked a stone with his foot to prove Bishop Berkeley wrong. In the works which centre around *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus kicks and goes on kicking until his toes are bloody and then cries, 'See ! It is not only real, it is hostile.' "

Between the two interpretations of the Camus hero given by Germaine Brée and Rayner Heppenstall, the difference is important as regards our evaluation of Camus as a philosopher. Camus-Sisyphus, despite Heppenstall's charge of naiveté against Camus, presents an absurdist view of life, which apparently is the only one that could prevent either a resistance journalist like Camus or a 'criminal' condemned to eternal punishment like Sisyphus from committing suicide. What Heppenstall seems unable to appreciate is the extremity of the situation which prompts such philosophical speculations as Camus's. The comparison with Doctor Johnson is inappropriate and misleading. What Camus says about Sisyphus' joy arises from his recognition of this extreme situation : from the rock bottom the only movement possible is upwards. The rock marks an end, for both Sisyphus and Prometheus.

The complex nature of the unrelenting Sisyphean task is made clear by Camus in the essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" :

All Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing. Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols. In the universe suddenly restored to its silence, the myriad wondering little voices of the earth rise up. Unconscious, secret calls, invitations from all the faces, they are the necessary reverse and price of victory. There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night. The absurd man says yes and his effort will henceforth be unceasing. If there is a personal fate, there is no higher destiny or at least there is but one which he concludes is inevitable and

despicable. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning towards his rock, in that slight pivoting, he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which becomes his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death. Thus, convinced of the wholly human origin of all that is human, a blind man eager to see who knows that the night has no end, he is still on the go. The rock is still rolling.

The chief aim of this paper is to compare the Sisyphus of Greek mythology and the Sisyphus of Camus with the Mad Man of Naranath (alias the Crazy Narayanan), the popular absurd hero of Kerala's folk legends. Naranath, one of the twelve children of the Brahmin sage Vararuci by his Pariah wife, is the hero of many stories with local variations in detail. He is the prototype of the absurd hero with an existentialist outlook on life, a characteristic product of the Malayalee imagination, usually a compound of fact and fantasy. Examples of the non-rational logic he applies to life situations may be found in the numerous humour stories told of the Namputiri or the Kerala Brahmin. Behind the apparent literal rationality of human actions may be perceived the underlying irrationality and arbitrariness—not only of life in this world nor of the phenomena of existence, but even of divine dispensations. Naranath, like Camus and also Camus's Sisyphus, is faced with the problem of fate, and like them triumphs over the inevitable by resorting to the Hegelian-Marxian principle of the recognition of necessity. There are stories in which he exposes the helplessness of the gods themselves to change the course of fate ever so slightly.<sup>7</sup> There is for instance his encounter with Bhadrakali who comes upon him as she is leading a procession, as usual, of ghosts, ghouls, demons and devils, to the cremation ground at the dead of night. Failing to frighten him away with their pranks from the ground to facilitate their nightly dance and festivities, Bhadrakali herself offers to leave the scene to him, provided he accepts some boon or blessing from her. Naranath, however, tells her that he does not want any boon or blessing from her. Under repeated compulsion he agrees to ask for a blessing. His strange request is to extend or reduce his life-time by one day : but Bhadrakali does not have the power to grant that. Even the gods cannot change fate. The only thing possible is some minor physical adjustment. So Naranath is finally prevailed upon to make a request within the range

of their power. He says, "O.K. Then take the filarial swelling on my left foot and put it on my right foot, and leave." Bhadrakali is pleased, and after shifting the swelling from one foot to the other, she and her gang leave.

What brings Naranath closer to Sisyphus is the fact that he too was a stone-roller. But for Naranath, it was his self-chosen hobby, while for Sisyphus it was a punishment imposed on him for his 'crimes'. What Camus seems to have added is that while walking down the hill Sisyphus must have worked it out in his mind and developed an awareness of what he was doing, thereby letting his comprehending intellect triumph over the physical situation. Naranath, on the other hand, has full self-possession right from the beginning. The version of the myth of Naranath given by Kottarathil Sankunni in his compilation *Aitihyamala* (A String of Legends, first published in Malayalam in 8 volumes, 1909-1934) gives the following details :

Narayanan used to earn his daily living by means of begging. All afternoon he would go begging for alms. The rice he was given he would collect in a copper vessel. At sunset, he would settle down wherever he was then. He would cook all the rice over the improvised oven and eat the whole of it. He would sleep in the same place. Early next morning he would start towards the hill. The whole forenoon he would be seen rolling the stone up the hill ; when the stone was brought to the top he would himself let it go down the hill. Watching the stone roll down he would clap his hands and laugh. The exercise would be repeated till noon. In the afternoon he would go his rounds for alms.

The main points of similarity between the two mythical stories are : (a) both roll a stone uphill ; (b) the stone does not stay at top ; (c) this activity is endlessly repeated ; (d) both heroes are absurd. The major points of contrast—which are, of course, more important than the similarities—are : (a) in Sisyphus the task is imposed from the outside, the action is not voluntary, whereas the Kerala hero does it by his own choice (unless someone wants to argue that given his character he is bound to this routine, that he has no freedom from himself) ; (b) Sisyphus is a tragic victim, while Naranath is an understanding actor or agent of his own destiny ; (c) Sisyphus' action is action proper, whereas Naranath's action is metaphorical and demonstrative ; (d) true to the Western tradition, suffering for

Sisyphus is destiny and glory, while for Naranath in the Hindu tradition all suffering is transcended, and transcendence is glory.

The way Camus interprets the myth of Sisyphus, the tragic victim (as in Sophoclean drama) acquires self-knowledge, and triumphs over his circumstances ; he is thereby elevated to the position of Naranath, who consciously enacts the story of stone-rolling for his own pleasure with a sense of drama. The sterility and futility of all human endeavour is emphasized by both. Camus, it must be said, uses this myth not just to prove that life is meaningless in itself, but that life can be, and should be, endowed with meaning, significance, beauty, and ultimately happiness. Instead of indulging in sentimental self-pity when faced with suffering, the Camus hero adds an affirmative dimension to the bleakness of life with the assertion and assumption that man is the creator of his own fate. The protest against one's destiny, as well as the triumph over it, is a guarantee of the inviolability of the individual, and is in itself a celebration of the value of freedom. If Camus had not underscored the element of joy in Sisyphus, the absurd would have stayed at the level of anguish ; with the consciousness of joy added, it transcends the tragedy of the given, and moves on to creation (creativity, creation of identity) and recreation. Whether Sisyphus is taken as a symbol of Man in this world, or of an artist committed to living, or of an intellectual engaged in resistance to tyranny with suicide as the only alternative, it is evident that he is defined by his situation more than by his action. Naranath, on the other hand, is defined entirely by what he chooses to do. He is not in a *predicament*, as his Greek counterpart is. What makes Sisyphus characteristically European is his role as an *agonistes* ; what makes him specifically Greek is the fact that his own actions in the present are controlled by his past, thereby leading to a tragic conflict. Naranath is Indian in the sense that he has reached the stage of *śānti* and *nirveda* after conquering the world of the senses ; the sparkle of humour in him is probably what marks him out as a Keralite. The dramatic transformation of a tragic victim or sacrificial sufferer into a transcendental visionary in Sisyphus is Greco-French ; the epic evolution of a semi-insane Naranath into a laughing sage, far above the coil and turmoil of earthly chores is perhaps in the Hindu-Malayalee tradition. The mad man of Naranath, in so far as he is commonly called a mad man, is an outsider in the sense in which Camus has used that term. Both Sisyphus

and Naranath seem to represent ideal—not real—states ; both speak for possibilities, not achieved goals. Both also represent minorities ; neither seems to vouchsafe on behalf of mass societies. Of the two, Sisyphus has more to do with a social group : his existence to a certain extent is dependent on the people around him. Action seems to be initiated outside of him ; he only tries to respond to it ; his response makes what he responds to alive and meaningful. Naranath goes on to imply that meaninglessness itself is a kind of meaning ; it is left to man to make it so. Sisyphus achieves freedom, only under the conditions of victimization ; Naranath, however, is born free, and is the truly liberated soul, whose happiness or well-being does not depend on anyone but himself. Even the gods have little to give him. Both Sisyphus and Naranath constitute in entirely divergent ways human challenges to divinity : both draw upon hidden resources that have kept the race going for so long.

#### NOTES

1. *The Greek Myths*, I (Penguin, 1955), p. 218.
2. *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London 1955), p. 96.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.
4. *Camus* (New Brunswick, 1959), pp. 213-14.
5. *Penguin New Writing*, 34 (1948), pp. 104-16.
6. *Op. cit.*, pp. 98-99.
7. For a fuller account of the deeds of the Mad Man of Naranath, the reader is referred to *Commonwealth Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 7 (June 1970), pp. 29-34.

## BHARATA AND ARISTOTLE

If Aristotle's views on comedy had come down to us, the comparison between the Indian and the Greek masters would have been richer and more objective. Tragedy which is conspicuous by its absence in Bharata's dramatic theory is not the only type of drama produced by the ancient Greeks. There was a lighter side to the Greek temperament which we often fail to perceive when we limit ourselves to the comparison between Sanskrit drama and Greek tragedy. But even as things stand, we may surmise that a good amount of what Aristotle says about tragedy applies also to comedy. Moreover, all Greek tragedies cannot be reduced to one single type. Unlike the Indian dramatists who wrote under the constant guidance of Bharata, the Greek tragedians had no common master and it was from the great variety of their dramatic conceptions that Aristotle elaborated his teaching on the composition of tragedy.

The main difference between tragedy and comedy in Aristotle's theory would bear on the nature of the subject : while tragedy is the imitation of a serious action meant to arouse pity and fear, comedy is the imitation of a frivolous action meant to arouse mirth and laughter. Like tragedy, comedy, too, should have a well-structured plot in which *hamartia*, *anagnôrisis* and *peripeteia* have their part to play, with this difference that the *hamartema* of comedy should cause neither pain (*anôdunon*) nor destruction (*ou phthartikon*).

Bharata, no less than Aristotle, is a plot-builder. He takes infinite pains to make of the plot an articulated whole. His teaching about the five *sandhis* and their sixty-four *sandhyangas* is more analytically elaborate than anything found in the *Poetics*. Both masters considered the plot to be the dynamic element of the drama. The sources of that dynamism is to be sought in desire. In his original



analysis of the *mukhasandhi*, Mātṛgupta<sup>1</sup> gives as its first seed *prārthanā*, which he defines as *viṣayautsukyam* or eagerness for the object pursued. And Aristotle would readily agree with him. Had Oedipus not been eager to rescue his city from the plague, there would have been no drama.

Hence a simple analysis of the working of desire will give us the basic structure of all dramas. The mechanism of desire can be represented by a simple sequence comprising three elementary functions<sup>2</sup> :

- a. Desire aroused
- b. Fulfilment sought<sup>3</sup>
- c. Either success or failure

This mechanism of desire is neither Indian nor Greek, it is universal. Bharata, however, does not accept the alternative of function (c) : for him the drama ends with the hero's success. In this attitude of the Indian master, we might be tempted to recognize the particular feature by which the Indian dramatic conception differs from the Greek. But this would not lead us very far, for, as we shall see later, a Greek tragedy need not end with the failure of the hero.

Starting, therefore, with the elementary sequence of the mechanism of desire, we immediately realize that, by itself, it can hardly arouse dramatic interest. It lacks the element of tension and struggle implied in any drama. Both Bharata and Aristotle would readily agree that dramatic action must be enlivened by obstacles raised on the path to fulfilment. Hence, the elementary sequence must be completed by the insertion of a secondary sequence :

- a. Desire aroused
- b. Fulfilment sought
  - d. Obstacle(s) raised
  - e. Obstacle(s) encountered
  - f. Obstacle(s) either overcome or victorious
- c. Either success or failure

Here again, Bharata makes a definite option : in function (f) the obstacle(s) must be overcome. Hence, function (c) retains the sole alternative of success.

Let us now put in parallel columns the above sequence, bracketing (d) and (e), and the five *avasthās* through which the hero must pass in the course of a full dramatic action according to Bharata :

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| a. Desire aroused                               | 1. <i>Ārambha</i>              |
| b. Fulfilment sought                            | 2. <i>Prayatna</i>             |
| d. and e. Obstacle(s) raised<br>and encountered | 3. <i>Prāptisambhava</i>       |
| f. Obstacle(s) overcome                         | 4. <i>Niyatā phalaprap̄pti</i> |
| c. Success                                      | 5. <i>Phalayoga</i>            |

This is how Viśvanātha defines the five *avasthās* :

1. *Ārambha* : *mukhyaphalasiddhaye utsukyam* : eagerness to reach the fulfilment of the main object.
2. *Prayatna* : *phalāvāptau vyāpāro'titvarānvitaḥ* : active exertion for obtaining the desired object. Eagerness translated into action.
3. *Prāptisambhava* : *upayāpayaśaṅkābhyaṃ prāptisambhavaḥ* : through the weighing of hopes and fears the perception of possible success.
4. *Niyatā phalaprap̄pti* : *apāyābhāvataḥ prāptistu niścītā* : through the removal of obstacles success is assured.
5. *Phalayoga* : *samagraphalodayaḥ* : complete fulfilment.

Sāgaranandin in his *Nāṭaka-lakṣaṇa-ratnaḥ*<sup>4</sup> while treating of *sandhis* quotes some unnamed rhetoricians who formulated the relation between the *sandhis* and the *avasthās* in a very elegant way :

1. *Ārambha* : the hero is *sādhakaḥ*, i.e. a man with a definite aim in view.
2. *Prayatna* : the hero starts on his *sādhanam*, i.e. on the realization of his purpose.
3. *Prāptisambhava* : the hero perceives clearly the *sādhyaṃ*, i.e. the goal to be reached, in the context of the difficulties to be encountered.
4. *Niyatā phalaprap̄pti* : the hero obtains *siddhi*, i.e. fulfils his purpose by overcoming the obstacles.
5. *Phalayoga* : the hero can now rest in the *sambhoga*, i.e. the enjoyment of his victory.

“Sādhakaḥ sādhanam sādhyam siddhiḥ sambhoga eva ca  
ityāhuḥ ke’pi nāṭyajñāḥ santaḥ sādhyādi pañcakam.”

Bharata and his followers were good structuralists. Aristotle never thought of putting it as the Indian masters did, but his plea for a well-structured plot in which incidents do not succeed each other haphazardly but through a causal sequence, reflects the same concern for inner consistency. As far as the mechanism of the dramatic action goes, there seems to be little difference between the Indian and the Greek approach, the more so, as we have noted above, that Aristotle would have insisted on a well-structured plan for comedy as well. In comedy, the hero overcomes the obstacles and gains the fulfilment of his initial desire. But this does not constitute the essential characteristic of comedy. For Aristotle, the distinction between tragedy and comedy is in the quality of the action which both imitate.

Since the seed of dramatic action is desire, and since it is the hero's pursuit of the desired object which animates the whole development of the drama, the essential difference between the Sanskrit *nāṭaka* and the Greek tragedy is to be sought in the manner in which desire is conceived of by Bharata and Aristotle. Obviously, the nature and quality of desire will depend on the character of the hero.

According to Bharata, the hero of the higher forms of drama should possess eminent qualities. The four categories of heroes : *dhīralalita*, *dhīraśānta*, *dhīrodātta* and *dhīroddhata* are variations of a common type. The hero is always noble. The list of his personal qualities is impressive : he has brilliance, elegance, charm, depth, steadfastness, a deep sense of honour, natural distinction and generosity. With such endowments he can trust the spontaneous urges of his unsullied nature. Thus King Duṣyanta feels a strong attraction towards a hermit girl and wonders whether, as a *kṣatriya* he should resist or indulge his incipient passion. His hesitation is short-lived, for, as he says,

Satām hi sandehapadeṣu vastuṣu  
pramāṇam antaḥkaraṇapravṛttayaḥ. (*Abhijñānaśakuntalam*, I. 22)

when naturally noble people are in doubt, they can safely rely on the promptings of their heart.

And his subsequent discreet enquiry confirms the rectitude of his

instinct. Hence, the *nāṭaka* introduces us to a luminous world untrammelled by internal conflicts. The hero's psychology is transparent, without ambiguity. There are no dark currents of subconscious urges vitiating his conscious motivations. There is no disturbing past encroaching surreptitiously on the apparent serenity of his noble ambitions, no hidden guilt casting its shadows on seemingly sound decisions. The subtlety of the Sanskrit drama does not reside in complex psychological introspections but rather in the delicate analysis of moods and the suggestive description of fluctuating emotions. But those emotions, in themselves, are simple, genuine and totally healthy.

Thus we have a blameless hero eagerly pursuing a fulfilment which he knows to be noble and untainted. How could the frustration of such a hero offer a suitable subject for a drama? Bharata would have found the suggestion ludicrous. And Aristotle himself would agree with him, for, in his eyes, the downfall of a noble and faultless hero would make very poor tragedy. Bharata's hero and the quality of his desire are such as to demand fulfilment.

Further, the hero's nature and the high quality of his desire will affect the fulfilment which will be complete fruition, undiluted delight and blissful plenitude. The memory of past trials and the apprehension of future adversity have no place at all in this final felicity. As the hero's aspiration was devoid of all ambiguity, so does the fulfilment fill his heart with a bliss unmingled with bitterness or self-reproach.

There is no doubt that Bharata had a didactic purpose in mind: the nobility of character is the guarantee of ultimate joy. There may be obstacles in the way, but final success is assured. The counter-proof is provided by the anti-hero who is driven by base and evil desires. He is the villain doomed to failure. There are no redeeming features in his character which would arouse the spectators' sympathy and his final discomfiture is greeted with the same enthusiastic applause as the hero's victory.

The tragic hero, according to Aristotle, is the man whose career arouses pity and fear. In order to define him more accurately, Aristotle proceeds by elimination. The following types do not qualify:

- a. the virtuous and noble man struck by adversity.

- b. the evil man obtaining success and prosperity. This type is the least tragic of all.
- c. the evil man falling into misfortune. This type may arouse a kind of sympathy, but no real pity or fear.

There is a fourth type which Aristotle does not mention, because it is obviously untragic :

- d. the virtuous and noble man obtaining success and fulfilment.

Hence, Bharata's hero, i.e. the noble and virtuous man attaining fulfilment cannot be a tragic hero. As to his anti-hero, he is so depicted that he does not even arouse the least sympathy in the audience.

There remains only one type likely to arouse pity and fear : the hero whose suffering is undeserved will arouse pity and he will arouse fear if, in spite of his nobility and integrity, he shares the lot of the average man. He must be sufficiently close to us to make us realize that what happens to him might also happen to us. What brings him close to us is not, in Aristotle's mind, some 'moral flaw', but some *involuntary* error or mistake (*hamartia*) which makes him an unwitting victim of forces which he ignores. This interpretation of *hamartia* is important, for its usual interpretation as 'moral flaw' has no other purpose than to show that the hero's suffering is deserved. Hence, it weakens the element of pity and, *ipso facto*, the tragic quality of the drama.

Let us remember that Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero is an integral part of his teaching concerning the plot-structure. He has expressed his preference for the complex plot, because it arouses the tragic emotions more effectively (*Poetics*, ch. IX). He has defined the complex plot as the plot articulated on *anagnôrisis* and *peripeteia* (ch. X). He has then defined recognition and reversal and added a third element, *pathos*, which he has defined as "an action (not an emotion) which is both destructive and painful" (ch. XI). In chapters XIII and XIV (chapter XII being a digression), he has shown how the various elements of the complex plot can be best arranged to produce the maximum tragic effect. At this point he is able to tell us what type of hero is needed for what he considers to be the perfect tragedy. The tragic hero *par excellence*—and he has King Oedipus

in mind—is a noble and virtuous man who, through involuntary ignorance (*hamartia*) has committed a *pathos*, i.e. an action both destructive and painful and who, through the logical sequence of his quest, is led to the recognition (*anagnôrisis*) of what he is and of what he has done and is shattered and crushed (*peripeteia*) by the realization of the truth.

I do not think that, besides *Oedipus Rex*, there is a single Greek tragedy which conforms fully to the Aristotelian ideal pattern. Neither is there a single tragic hero, apart from King Oedipus, whose dramatic action combines in the ideal sequence the four elements of the tragic plot : *hamartia*, *pathos*, *anagnôrisis* and *peripeteia*.

Hence, the attempt at finding in every Greek tragedy those four features of the perfect plot is a vain attempt. This applies specially to *hamartia*. The special tragic value given by Aristotle to *hamartia* is that it makes the suffering of the hero undeserved and, consequently, more worthy of pity. The combination *hamartia-pathos*, a heinous action committed in ignorance, heightens the emotional potential of the plot : *hamartia* by purifying the crime of its odiousness purifies the hero as well and makes of him an object of deeper pity.

Yet, for all the stress he lays on the perfect plot, Aristotle never denies the possibility and the existence of other tragedies which, though less perfect, have the power to arouse pity and fear. The 'moral flaw' is a substitute for *hamartia* and, in the measure in which it makes of the suffering of the hero a *deserved* punishment, it weakens the emotion of pity in the audience.

We must, therefore, give up the attempt at reducing all Greek tragedies to one single pattern. Each tragedy must be studied on its own merit and one method of doing so is to determine how close or how far it is from Aristotle's ideal plot-structure.

This clarification of Aristotle's position was necessary before pursuing our comparison between the hero of Bharata and that of Aristotle and between the respective quality of their desire. In the context of this paper, the best is to choose a few tragedies which conform to Bharata's structure, i.e. tragedies in which the hero or heroine's desire reaches fruition. This should be a rewarding study, for it will lead us to a better understanding of the conditions on which the fruition is tragical and of those on which it is not.

The best example of a 'Bharatian' tragedy is the *Medea* of

Euripides. Judged by the standard of Aristotle's ideal plot, it is lacking in many respects. It has no *hamartia*, no *anagnôrisis*. *Peripeteia* is in full evidence. *Pathos* (destructive and heinous) abounds. There is, however, a substitute for *hamartia* : instead of involuntary ignorance, we have the blind and irresistible passion of a woman who has been deeply and unjustly hurt. This element is very important, for without it Medea would be nothing but a loathsome monster. On the other hand, *Medea* has a plot which fits perfectly the structure proposed by Bharata, as the short analyse which follows will demonstrate.

### 1. *Ārambha* or *Desire aroused*

The prologue introduces us to the situation in which Medea conceives a violent desire for vengeance. Banished from Iolkos, Jason and Medea have found refuge in Corinth. Jason the opportunist has married Glauke, the daughter of Kreon, king of Corinth. Medea's old nurse describes her smarting under the stinging betrayal of the man for whom she had abandoned all that was dear to her. She loathes the sight of her children. The nurse is full of apprehension : "She may be nursing some strange resolve. She has a violent temper and will not bear being ill-used. I know her and I am frightened. She is dangerous. No one who incurs her enmity can hope to escape unscathed." (*Medea*, 17-45)

### 2. *Prayatna* or *Fulfilment sought*

Medea tells the Corinthian women of the Chorus how bitter she feels and asks them not to betray her : "This is my only request : if I find a way, a stratagem to make my husband pay for his villainy, I ask you to be silent." (*Medea*, 259-63). She does not mean to remain inactive, she is bent on using her magical powers to punish her unfaithful husband.

### 3. *Prāptisambhava* or *Obstacles raised and encountered*

Three obstacles stand in the way of Medea's resolution. First, Creon's order of immediate banishment ; second, the fact that Medea has nowhere to go once she leaves Corinth ; third, her maternal instinct. As these obstacles are faced and overcome, the changes of success become clearer and clearer,

First obstacle : she obtains from Kreon a respite for one day. Her remark to the Chorus is significant : "The man is such a fool that, having the power to ruin my plans by throwing me out immediately, he allows me to stay for today. This day three of my enemies will die, the father, the bride and my husband." (*Medea*, 371-75) She has not yet devised any definite plan. She is concerned about her own safety after the crime : "Once they are dead, which city will receive me ? What host will offer me refuge in his land and safety in his house ? I do not see. Let us wait a little. If, by chance, some powerful help offers itself, I will do the deed by cunning and stealth." (*Medea*, 386-91)

Second obstacle : Aegeus appears. She obtains from him the solemn promise that Athens will give her hospitality. Her safety being assured, her mind is free to plan the details of her vengeance. She will not kill Jason. Instead, she will kill his bride and her father and then strike him where he is most vulnerable by putting his children to death : "I will kill my own children. No one will take them away from me. After wiping out the whole house of Jason, I shall leave this land, fleeing from the murder of my beloved children. . . . The children born of me, he will not see alive again and his new bride will never give him a son." (*Medea*, 792-99 ; 803-05) Her feigned repentance and submission induce Jason to accept the wedding gifts to be offered to Glauke by the children.

Third obstacle : the messenger brings the news of the disaster : both the princess and the king are dead. Medea steels herself against her motherly instinct and kills her children.

#### 4. *Niyatā phalaprap̄pti* or *Obstacles overcome*

When Jason enters, the Chorus tells him that Medea has killed his sons.

#### 5. *Phalayoga* or *Success*

Medea triumphs over Jason. The *peripeteia* is complete : "Did you expect, after defiling my womanhood, to lead a happy life and to laugh at me ? Call me what you like – lioness or Scylla. What matters is that I have struck your heart where it hurts most." (*Medea*, 1354-60)

I am fully aware of the apparent incongruity of putting *Medea*



under the aegis of Bharata. But it is that very incongruity which is interesting, for it shows that, had Bharata so willed, he could have enriched Sanskrit literature with the gift of tragedy, without changing his plot-structure. He had his reasons to shut out from his vision the seedy side of human life. Euripides felt otherwise and created Medea. The contrast between Medea and Śakuntalā, two women repudiated by their husbands, gives the measure of the gulf which separates the Indian heroic comedy from Greek tragedy.

Medea, like Duṣyanta, follows the promptings of her heart and, like him, fulfils her desire. She gloats over her triumph. But her fulfilment is tragic for it carries within it all the horror which vitiated her initial desire. She has a disturbing past which keeps intruding into her present. She has the unconventional intensity of the barbarian. Her passion for Jason has led her to abandon her old father, to kill her brother and to deceive the daughters of Pelias into murdering their father. The security promised by Aegeus is a poor palliative for the disease which festers in her heart. There is something frightening in the elemental power taking possession of a human heart and driving it relentlessly on the path of a disastrous triumph. And Medea, the willing and helpless victim of that power, after reducing Jason to an empty shell, remains alone with herself, a pitiable flotsam belonging nowhere.

Le ver est dans le fruit, le réveil dans le rêve,  
et le remords est dans l'amour. . . .

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra, too, is successful in her enterprise. There is no *hamartia* in her life. What she has done and plans to do is the fruit of conscious deliberation. Yet, as in the case of Medea so also in her case, there is a substitute for *hamartia* : the curse of Thyestes which contaminates the royal house and condemns each member of that house to be both an instrument and a victim of the Erinyes whose thirst for blood is insatiable. Aeschylus, however, never absolves his tragic characters of moral responsibility. In the case of Clytemnestra, this becomes clear if we analyze the complexity of her motivations. As an unfaithful wife, she is anxious to remove her husband from Argos. But it is essential that Agamemnon should not suspect her infidelity and the blatant effrontery of her profession of fidelity succeeds in keeping her royal husband in the dark. The grievance which she publicly

uses as a justification for her crime is the cruel loss of her daughter : the aggrieved mother hides the unfaithful wife. And, behind both, lurks the jealous woman humiliated by the silent presence of Cassandra. But once the crime is committed, she has nothing to hide and she reveals to the old men of the Chorus the triple fulfilment which the death of Agamemnon and Cassandra has brought to her :

Will you hear the righteous import of my oath ? By the perfect Justice avenging my child, by Ate and Erinyes to whom I have immolated this man, I swear that no fear will enter the palace as long as Aegisthus is there to kindle the fire of the altar and bestows his favour on me, as he did before. He is the broad shield of my security. There lies the man who slighted my womanly honour, the darling of the Chryseises around Troy. And there lies his captive, the seer, the prophetess whom he took to bed. Faithful, she shares his couch as she used to share the bunk of his ship. They both are justly punished. He fell without a word. She, like a swan, sang her supreme dirge before lying in her lover's embrace. And it is he who brought her to me as an added relish to my triumph. (*Agamemnon*, 1431-47)

In this song of triumph, Clytemnestra appears in her true colours : the mother of Iphigeneia is eclipsed by the mistress of Aegisthus and the jealous wife of a philandering husband. Her triumph, however, is soon clouded by the realization that her person and motivations have been used by the evil genius of Atreus' house, not to avenge her daughter, but to sacrifice the son of Atreus as a bloody reparation for the children of Thyestes. Her evil designs have become the instruments of a malefic power which she hopes in vain to have banished from the palace. Clytemnestra's fulfilment, like that of Medea, is vitiated in its source. "Le ver est dans le fruit . . ."

With the *Electra* of Sophocles, we are far removed from the tragic world of Medea and Clytemnestra. Judged from Aristotle's point of view, the play has no *hamartia*. As to *anagnôrisis* and *peripetela*, they are the very soul of the play. There is the false recognition of Orestes as dead which dispels all the apprehensions of Clytemnestra and sends Electra to the very depths of desperation. Then comes the true recognition of Orestes alive : Electra passes from despair to hope and joy. At the end of the play we have Aegisthus raising the shroud which covers the corpse and recognizing Clytemnestra where he expected to find Orestes. In depicting the fluctuations of

apprehension, hope and despair Sophocles has reached an Indian perfection rarely witnessed elsewhere.

Seen in the light of Bharata's theory, the *Electra* of Sophocles is a nearly perfect illustration of the five *avasthās*. Electra's single-minded purpose brought into relief by the timorous attitude of Chrysothemis, her resolve to do the deed herself when everything seems to work against her, her irrepressible joy when Orestes reveals himself alive, the double murder accomplished without the slightest sign of compunction and the final conclusion of the Chorus celebrating the newly regained freedom of Argos, the whole development of the plot with its serene conclusion is much more Indian than Greek. That is why *Electra* fails as a tragedy : not because it is built according to Bharata's plot-structure, but because the ambiguity of the heroine's initial purpose is not reflected in the final fulfilment. There is something hollow and unreal in the almost cynical manner in which Orestes and Electra watch Aegisthus raising the veil which hides the mother whom they have murdered. Compared with Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, the *Electra* of Sophocles is a brilliant pastiche whose artistic and delicately wrought ornamentation fails to hide its inner vacuity.

*Oedipus Rex* is, in the eyes of Aristotle, the perfect tragedy, because it combines into an ideal structure the four elements of the complex plot. Under the effect of *hamartia* (ignorance), the hero has committed two heinous crimes (*pathos*) : he has killed his father and married his mother. Thus he appears when the play begins. The tragic value of *hamartia* must be clearly understood. There is no question here of a moral flaw, but of ignorance : subjectively, Oedipus is innocent ; objectively his life is vitiated by his past crimes. When the plague breaks out, he is genuinely concerned and his intention to do everything to save his city is subjectively as sound and pure as Duṣyanta's desire to marry Śakuntalā. The difference between the two heroes is that Duṣyanta has no past, whereas Oedipus carries the burden of a criminal past which he is ignorant of, but which, nevertheless, contaminates his whole existence. Here, therefore, the vitiating element is not an overriding passion as in the case of Medea, nor a morally ambiguous situation as in the case of Clytemnestra. The contamination is not psychological, but ontological.

The whole play develops on the pattern of Bharata's doctrine, except for the fact that the original intention of the king to save the city from the plague is, by the very logic of the play, changed into Oedipus's anxious quest for his identity. At the end, when the obstacles have been removed by the revelation of the Corinthian messenger and of the old Theban shepherd, the fulfilment of both intentions is simultaneous : the murderer of Laius and the incestuous parricide are the same person.

Right from the start, when Kreon brings back the oracle from Delphi, we know that Oedipus is "the unclean thing polluting the soil of Thebes". Through *hamartia*, Oedipus is not conscious of the 'foul corruption' contaminating his noblest thoughts and designs. Gradually the light of recognition dispels his ignorance and the fulfilment of his quest is both the salvation of the city and his personal disaster. For Aristotle, this final *peripeteia* brought about by the *anagnôrisis* of a *pathos* (heinous crime) committed through *hamartia* constitutes the perfect tragedy. "Le ver est dans le fruit" not as a moral or psychological flaw, but as a hidden and objective infection, as a dormant cancerous growth which sooner or later is bound to reveal its deleterious power.

At the other end of the spectrum of Greek tragedy we find plays which are much closer to the Sanskrit romantic comedy than to *Oedipus Rex*. Such is the *Ion* of Euripides based on a legend in which the supernatural abounds and in which the hero comes to know his real identity through a sign of recognition (*abhijñāna*). A simple analysis of the play will show us that Euripides, had he known both Aristotle and Bharata, would have chosen the Indian master as his guide rather than the Stagirite.

We are at Delphi, in front of Apollo's temple. Hermes in the Prologue gives us a short account of the past incidents which form the background of the action. Creusa, daughter of the Athenian king Erechtheus, was raped by Apollo in one of the caves on the slope of Athena's hill. A baby-boy was born secretly and Creusa out of shame and fear abandoned the child in the cave where he was conceived. She put him in a basket wrapped in a piece of cloth which she herself had embroidered and adorned with a necklace made of two golden serpents and a crown of olive-leaves. Apollo ordered Hermes to take the child to the Delphian temple and to

leave him on the steps of the sanctuary. The priestess of the temple found the child, had pity on him and brought him up without knowing who he was. He is now a fine young man and has been appointed guardian of the treasures of Apollo. In the meantime, Creusa has married Xouthos, a foreigner who fought bravely for Athens against Euboea and obtained the hand of the royal princess as a reward. But they have no children and they have both come to Delphi in the hope of gaining Apollo's blessing on their union.

Enters Ion : while adorning the temple with laurel branches and sacred garlands he sings his happiness of being Apollo's acolyte. His joy would be complete if he knew whose child he is.

The Chorus made of a group of Creusa's handmaids enter the orchestra and admire the beautiful carvings of the temple. Creusa arrives and enters into a conversation with Ion. She pretends to have come to Delphi on behalf of a friend who was ill-used by Apollo and abandoned her child. Ion is moved by the story and tells her about his own predicament. He doubts whether Apollo will favour Creusa with an oracle which would be a confession of his own crime.

Xouthos appears and enters the temple while Ion, disturbed by the account of Apollo's profligacy, wonders why humans should be bound by laws which the gods themselves do not observe. The women of the Chorus pray that a son may be born to Xouthos.

Xouthos has received an oracle : the first person whom he meets as he comes out of the temple is his son. He comes face to face with Ion, tells him about the oracle and asks him to accompany him to Athens. Ion readily welcomes the oracle, embraces his father, but shows no inclination towards political entanglement. Regarding his mother, Xouthos is unable to satisfy him : before his marriage with Creusa he often took part in the Festival of Bacchus and the unknown woman who gave birth to Ion must have abandoned him on the steps of the temple. They both agree that Creusa should not be told of her husband's former adventures : Ion will be received in Athens as a distinguished guest. Xouthos invites his son to a banquet and forbids the women of the Chorus, under the pain of death, to tell Creusa that he has found his son.

Creusa returns accompanied by an old retainer. The women of the Chorus tell her about the oracle : Xouthos has found his son, but Creusa is not the mother. She resents the happiness of her

husband and, under the instigation of the old retainer, decides to do away with Ion. The old retainer will go to the banquet and poison the cup of Ion.

The plot is discovered and Creusa is condemned to death. Ion enters and Creusa takes shelter at the foot of the altar. An altercation follows. Then the priestess of Apollo appears carrying the basket in which she found Ion, the unknown baby of long ago. She gives the basket to Ion : with it he will be able to identify his mother. Fascinated by the sight of the basket, Creusa grabs it and calls Ion her son. Ion recovers the basket and questions Creusa : "Is this basket empty or does it contain something ?" One by one, Creusa describes the embroidered cloth, the necklace made of two golden serpents and the crown of olive-leaves. Mother and son embrace. Creusa tells Ion that Xouthos is not his father, his father is Apollo. Ion wonders if his mother is not trying to hide under the cover of a divine love-affair a sinful union of her maiden days. At that moment, Athena appears, sent by Appollo, to confirm the story of Creusa. Ion will reign, lawful successor of Erechtheus. Creusa will keep her maternity secret in order to maintain Xouthos in the illusion that he has found his son. The Chorus concludes :

Honour to Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto. Whatever misfortunes may fall on a house, let its people find their comfort in serving the gods. For, at the end, the good will get their reward, while the evil reap the misery which they have sown.

A double *hamartia* finds in a mutual recognition a felicitous denouement : Creusa, ignorant that Ion is her son, plans to kill him. The plot fails and Ion, ignorant that Creusa is his mother, decides to take her life. The basket is the providential sign of recognition and the final intervention of Athena dispels all doubts. So also, in *Abhijñānaśakuntalam*, Duṣyanta, ignorant that he is the victim of a curse, repudiates Śakuntalā in perfect good faith while Śakuntalā, equally unaware of the curse, accuses him of shameless duplicity. The ring restores memory to the king without revealing to him the cause of his former blindness. He meets his son in the hermitage of Mārīca, recognizes him and sees Śakuntalā sad and unable to forget the humiliation to which he subjected her. Finally, Mārīca reveals to them how Durvāsā's curse brought about the long estrangement

which made them both suffer. The atmosphere is cleared and there remain only joy and serenity.

Euripides is more melodramatic than Kālidāsa and the element of dupery on which the fulfilment of Xouthos rests casts a shadow on the happy denouement. But there is nothing tragic about it. Apollo's wry sense of humour animates the whole play. Sent by Apollo, Athena explains everything: "I am the messenger of Apollo. He does not want to appear in person for fear of Creusa's bitter reproaches. Creusa is your mother and Apollo your father. But the god entrusts you to another who is not your father but through whom you will be able to enter into the noblest of all dynasties. . . . Apollo was afraid lest you should perish through your mother's wiles, and she through yours, and he saved you both through his clever devices. . . . And now, Creusa, be discreet and do not reveal that Ion is your son. Let Xouthos be happy in his illusion, while you cherish your treasure. Good luck ! your troubles are over and I foretell a prosperous future for all of you." (*Ion*, 1556-65 ; 1601-05)

That Bharata's five *avasthās* and Aristotle's complex plot, far from being incompatible, can combine in various degrees of harmony, should by now be obvious. The contrast between Greek tragedy and Sanskrit comedy is not, therefore, a matter of formal structure. Its cause must be sought in the difference between two conceptions of the dramatic action. Every drama can be compared to the slow maturing of a seed into a flower or a fruit. Bharata's optimism determines his option for a seed which is intact, healthy and without blemish : the flower will be fresh and pure, the fruit, unspoilt and delicious. Aristotle keeps closer to real life, as reflected in the works of the fifth century B.C. The seed of tragedy lies in the ambiguity of the human heart. Human desire either contains or hides a germ of infection which is bound to affect its fulfilment. It may be, as in the case of Clytemnestra, a conscious duplicity using an apparently rightful motivation as a cover for a less avowable one. It may be a wild passion, as in the case of Medea. But, for Aristotle, the most tragic ambiguity is that which is the effect of *hamartia* : a criminal past of which the hero is not aware but which, nevertheless, vitiates all his undertakings, until its horror emerges in full light, shattering all illusions of power and nobility.

Bharata conceived the drama as a fifth *Veda* meant to lead the people of the *Kaliyuga* to the refined experience of an emotional liberation beyond the struggles and miseries of the enslaved ego. Aristotle saw in tragedy a forceful reminder of our human condition and knew that the emotions of pity and fear, when aroused through the medium of the dramatic art, can create an aesthetic relish of unsurpassed quality.

#### NOTES

1. See Sāgaranandin, *Nāṭaka-lakṣaṇa-ratnakoṣa*, ed., transl. into Bengali and annotated by Siddheśvara Caṭṭopādhyāya, Calcutta, 1978, p. 60.
2. For further information regarding structural analysis, see my two articles 'From Aristotle to Roland Barthes', *JJCL*, vol. 13, 1975, and the 'Structural Analysis in Action', *JJCL*, vol. 14-15, 1977.
3. I omit the obvious alternative 'Fulfillment not sought', for the simple reason that it would arrest all dramatic action,



## THE DESIGN OF A NOVEL FROM AFRICA

A lucky personal encounter with a foreign visitor may lead at times to the discovery of abiding things in the literature of his country. At least that is how I personally came to discover Achebe. Two African writers came to visit us at Jadavpur, and we at once became enchanted by their old world manners and an unassuming confidence in their vocation which we do not always find among our contemporary writers. With graceful generosity and a robust sense of humour they told us how only sociologists and anthropologists rather than literary scholars from the West showed any real interest in their creative writings. This touched a sympathetic chord in our heart, and I soon found myself hunting for books coming from that ancient but unfamiliar continent. The collection contained an American paperback edition of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and I am happy that it did. This is a novel of remarkable artistry and interest written on the historical confrontation, during Africa's colonial era, of two very dissimilar civilizations and cultures — African-Nigerian on the one hand, and the Western-Christian on the other. The history of this confrontation is not very old and should be part of the living memory in that country. A consummate transformation of this social and historical material has been achieved with such sophistication and control in creating a deeply relevant work of art that one at once comes to admit that 'Chinua Achebe is, quite simply, one of the best novelists alive.'

When I report that *Things Fall Apart* is based on the historical events in Nigeria, I do not mean that this fact in itself has any important bearing on the excellence of the novel. This, however, is exactly the reason why many Western critics and reviewers have excitedly recommended the book. Margaret Laurence, for instance,

applauds *Things Fall Apart* for being the 'best novel written deeply out of the West-African dilemma, the battle between the old and the new gods.' As for its literary excellence she seems to have doubts, because its author, she declares, 'cannot express how he feels about the people he loves' though like everyman he 'must take onto himself the terrible weight of his unshared responsibility.' Clearly, she praises the novel for non-literary reasons and rudely dismisses its literary claims. A patently socio-anthropologically oriented reviewer of the *New York Times* has also the following laudatory words to say :

*Things Fall Apart* takes its place with that small company of sensitive books that describe primitive society from inside. In a few years there can be no more. Then these books will become a rich storehouse for future, full of nostalgia, and (perhaps) a never-to-be-recaptured truth.

Well, this is not how a novel should be recommended ! Everyone knows that the novel is the first cousin to history and sociology. If you so desire, it is quite possible to derive from a novel an impression of a foreign society with which you are not familiar. Even then one must have the good sense of not confusing social and anthropological details from a novel of any consequence with the actual situation prevailing there. The novel certainly makes use of the varied and inclusive experiences that life offers, but it can hardly be called a faithful mirror of that life, or be used as a reliable source book of social and historical documents. Between the facts of life and the created work stands the not-so-negligible-figure of the novelist himself whose job is not simply to imitate. The artistic method he follows defines the specific nature of the relationship that exists between the picture provided by a novel and the actual social reality. Even when he follows the realistic method, the world he creates can only have a subtle and oblique relation with the social truth. Any attempt at recreating the social history of nineteenth century Russia, for instance, by using the novel of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as source material would, I believe, land us in trouble. To assess the importance of a Balzac or a Dickens as a novelist, in terms of the sociological interest that may satisfy is not likely to be very impressive. No respectable literary critic of Western literature, if his real concern is *literature* and not history or sociology or some other thing, would seriously contemplate any such project.

And yet it is exactly this poor sociological device that Western critics invoke when the novel happens to come from some little known non-Western and possibly non-affluent country. The social situation can determine the art form which an author comes to utilise, but such causal study of a novel is of small value for its analysis, description and evaluation.

This critical attitude mentioned above probably presupposes non-Western authors' desperate dependance in a predominantly Western readership. In their own countries, qualified readers are supposed to be non-existent, hostile or poor in taste. William Walsh, in his introduction to *Readings in Commonwealth Literature* (1973) has this to say about the predicament of creative writers from nondescript places of the world :

There is nothing to support the professional writer — no adequate audience, no substantial body of qualified critics, no sufficient range of publishers or journals.

This, I suppose, is an uncharitable generalisation of the situation as would be evident from what Achebe has to say in this connection. Ironically, I quote from an article in the same volume edited by Mr. Walsh ! Achebe does not write for a small coterie. He makes it perfectly clear that he is not an admirer of what is known as 'pure' art or of art viewed as an autonomous artifact, nor does he primarily write for strangers. Unlike the artist in the industrially developed Western world, who since the middle of the nineteenth century has been generally in revolt against the society, Achebe of the new Africa desires to belong to his people as a teacher with a mission. 'I do not know,' says Achebe in this forcefully written credo, 'if African writers write with a foreign audience in mind. What I do know is that they don't have to. At least I know that I don't have to. Last year — (he was referring to 1964) — the pattern of sales of *Things Fall Apart* in the cheap paperback edition was as follows : about 800 copies in Britain, 20,000 in Nigeria, and about 2,500 in all other places.' Achebe, like all self-respecting authors, evidently writes primarily for his *own* readers. But when he insists that his mission is that of a teacher, and that art and education do not have to be mutually exclusive, he, I think, speaks with tongue in cheek. His artist teacher is quite an unconventional teacher and is not the perpetrator of the current social values, a huckster of shoddy mental

wares. He is the conscience of his community and is determined to remain free to disagree with the society, even 'to go into rebellion against it if need be.' Art is his medium of instruction in a very special sense authorizing him to declare :

I would be quite satisfied if my novels ( especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past — with all its imperfections — was not one long night of savagery from which the first European acting on God's behalf delivered them.

This sounds very much like the voice of an angry man from the exploited colonies of yesteryears, of a man who cannot forget the 'disaster brought upon the African psyche in the period of subjection to the alien races.' But his anger is evenly directed to the victims and victors, for his aim is to help his society 'regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration.' Many readers possibly find this complex attitude somewhat difficult to appreciate. This explains Margaret Laurence in her *Long Drums and Cannons* :

In his novels, we see man as a creature whose means of communication infinitely subtle and infinitely clumsy, a pray to invariable misunderstandings. Yet Achebe's writing also conveys the feeling that we must attempt to communicate, however imperfectly, if we are not to succumb to despair or madness. The words which are spoken are rarely the words which are heard, we must go on speaking.

Yes, as can be seen from this response, with all his artistic simplicity and candour, Achebe is difficult, sometimes even obscure, because he does not fit in. Even the nationalism used in his art is of a quite unconventional kind.

Readers of *Things Fall Apart* may have been intrigued by the obvious association of W. B. Yeats with the very title of the novel. Why Yeats? What did he have in common with the world that Achebe creates for us? Did that come merely as a handy expression for use? One is then further intrigued by other characteristic and loaded expressions right out of the later Yeats ('I'll-re-that-burns-without-faggots', or 'they are gay') used in the text of the novel with multiple layers of implication, Achebe, I believe, is sophisticated enough not to convey through this device some conscious purpose. And this purpose, as I understand it, is to point

out to the readers the similarity that exists between the Irish Yeats and the Nigerian Achebe in their attitude to the use of nationalism in art as in certain other areas of perception. Nationalism is an essential element in their work, but they both transcend it in the process of creation. Details of national life are not used realistically. They become useful symbols in art. Achebe's nationalism in art is quite in agreement with what Yeats had suggested in an article written as early as 1888 :

To the greater poets everything they see has its relation to the national life, and through that to the universal and divine life : nothing is an isolated artistic moment, there is unity everywhere.... But to this universalism, this seeing of unity everywhere, you can only attain through what is near you, your nation, or, if you be no traveller, your village and the cobwebs on your walls. You can no more have the greater poetry without a nation than a religion without symbols. One can only reach out to the universe with a gloved hand — that glove is one's nation, the only thing one knows even a little of.

My reading of this novel convinces me that Achebe's artistic method, or the artistic convention which he follows, is not quite different from what W. B. Yeats announces in the lines quoted above. Achebe also reaches out to the universe with a gloved hand, and that glove is the finely organized traditional life of Iboland which, one supposes, he knows a little of. Achebe, like Yeats, is not a realistic writer at all, at least in *Things Fall Apart*. He uses the facts of life symbolically. To read or preserve his novels as a marvellous storehouse of vanishing tribal customs and ways of Ibo life on its coming into contact with Western civilization would amount to clutching at a naked glove without caring to know what the glove is doing there. I suggest that *Things Fall Apart* should be read and appreciated as a subtle modern novel by a great Nigerian novelist, and should then be assessed as novels are assessed anywhere else.

I am happy to note that in his *Introduction to the African Novel* (1972) Estace Palmer, an African critic from Sierra Leone, expresses similar views regarding the necessary approach to novels from Africa. The African author's unique experience, says Mr. Palmer, 'has probably led the African novelist to evolve new forms, not new genres. Since we are still concerned with the same genre, the same criteria still apply.' The problem is to define the criteria and justify their application. Mr. Palmer does not fulfil that expectation.

## II

*Introduction to the African Novel* discusses *Things Fall Apart* to come to the conclusion that it does deserve what the author calls its 'universal fame' because Achebe demonstrates here his 'awareness of social forces, psychological penetration, powers of characterisation and expertise in the use of language which we normally expect in much more experienced novelists.' But the necessary awareness is missing that the critic had been dealing with a novel which is structurally different from other literary genres and which therefore demands a characteristic treatment.

Mr. Palmer begins with a statement on the supposed theme of the novel which, according to him, is as follows :

With the arrival of the whiteman and his new religion and administration traditional society's cracks and weaknesses, hitherto concealed by the common fear of the ancestors and the gods, break open and the once-stable community collapses.

He thus views the novel as a realistic social document. Any one who reads the novel carefully with unpreconceived notions will find this summary of a theme woefully inadequate, even misleading. Mr. Palmer himself refers to the unified society of Umuofia in Iboland where the story is unfolded as 'proud, dignified and stable' having a 'complicated system of customs and traditions extending from birth, through marriage to death.' It has 'its own legal, educational, religious, and hierarchical systems, and conventions governing relations between the various generations are as any to be found in a Jane Austen novel.' Why does then this society fall apart ? Because of its 'cracks and weaknesses' ? Which cracks and which weaknesses ? The fear of capricious gods ? magic and the evil Forest ? Fear or awe ? 'Monstrous injunctions of the gods' which the people unquestioningly accepted ? Were the religion and social customs and the political system of the whiteman necessarily better in every aspect ? How does then Mr. Palmer discover the same vices in both ? The Ibo society, he observes, 'is just as competitive, just as concerned with status as any to be found in the Western world.' I for one fail to gather similar impressions from the text of the novel, and am not convinced that the author himself desires us to understand his novel in the Christian moral terms. I do not find in Okonkwo, the hero, a violent bully.

He is not a 'cold dehumanised person' or a 'life denying force' that is doomed to failure. To think so is a complete misunderstanding of the novel, and cannot be substantiated from the design of the novel itself. It ends with the self-destruction of the hero, but this awe-inspiring death never creates the impression that we are witnessing some instructive poetic justice. On the other hand, I find in it a triumphant and unavoidable exit of a tragic hero who somehow reminds me of the end of the Celtic mythical hero Cuchulaine on which Yeats wrote a beautiful poem. Cuchulaine also kills his son to remain faithful to the heroic code, and then himself dies fighting a fruitless battle with the invulnerable tides of the ocean. Death certainly comes to all. Only the hero of a particular type chooses to die heroically in a necessarily futile battle. He does not bend and compromise. He becomes the mask of the hero.

If you begin with the notion that all novels are realistic and so is *Things Fall Apart*, you have to gloss over many intractable things in the text until it is made to say what you want it to say.

### III

*Things Fall Apart* is a tightly constructed novel in three parts. Part 1, the longest, contains thirteen chapters each. The method of telling the story is not realistic or analytical, nor does the narrative follow any chronological sequence. Like the teller of an epic tale the author establishes in sharply drawn lines the main features of the hero whose destiny occupies us from the beginning to the end. Past incidents are told almost incidentally. Sometimes the hero is shown in the present, among his own people pursuing their strictly controlled way of life. The very first thing we are told about Okonkwo, the hero, is his great achievement as a wrestler in early youth. Wrestling in this context is only a strong man's game, not a violent man's sadism. Okonkwo, we remember, had a hunter's gun, but he never killed for joy. His wrestling feat was not a personal triumph, he brought honour to his village by 'throwing' an invincible rival. This is another way of telling us how much the Ibo people valued valour and honour. Son of an improvident and lazy father whom the community, following an ancient code of conduct did not allow even a proper grave on his death, Okonkwo, when the novel begins.

has already established himself as the most respected elder of the same community by his inflexible will and self-confidence, sheer courage and very hard work. He can now wear the ceremonial sacred mask of the ancestral spirit of the village. This, I suppose, is a very intelligent and artistic use of the Yeatsian mask, only Achebe makes his mask more credible and concrete. Without a traditional sanction, Yeats could only impose his masks on dramatic personae as an artistic device. We are told that Okonkwo is one of the greatest men of his time, the mightiest wrestler and warrior alive, though his people are not shown to be interested in any meaningless war. "In fairness to Umuofia," the narrator informs us, "it should be recorded that it never went to war unless its case was clear and just and was accepted as such by the Oracle." But when occasion does arise, it is Okonkwo who is chosen by his people to carry the message of war or to conclude an honourable settlement with the enemy.

It is necessary to remember that all this tallies exactly with the common motifs found in the life of the hero in most epics and heroic tales. Okonkwo's youth had passed in humiliation. People jeered at him as the son of an *agbala*, a womanly man, who could not take any title of honour in accordance with the ancient customs. He had not inherited any property because his father had none, and had acquired everything himself to make life meaningful so that the most beautiful woman of the community ran away from her husband to become Okonkwo's second wife. Strong and courageous, he is determined to conquer all opponents, and win fame with posterity. All his actions and behaviour are strictly bound by a stern heroic code. His anger is famous, we are told, but he is angry either when his honour is injured or when his expectations from others get frustrated. Consider, for instance, a seemingly violent episode with his second wife for whom he had a very special corner in his heart. When she forgets the limits of decorum and slightly refers to his decorative rusty gun with which nothing ever had been killed, he madly runs into his room for the loaded gun, aims at her, and presses the trigger. The loud report is accompanied by the wail of his wives children. We are shocked at this utter lack of self-control, but that is just because our values are not heroic. Okonkwo cannot be called a heartless brute. The very next moment he jumps into the barn fearing the worst to happen, and heaves a sigh of relief when he



discovers that his wife was unhurt. We had been told before that this great hero had never killed a mouse for pleasure. Moral indignation towards this man is quite uncalled for. If anything, he is somewhat eccentric, and this only makes him more convincing.

He certainly has his idiosyncrasies and weaknesses, but for all his iniquities he humbly and unquestioningly receives the necessary punishment decreed by the ever-wakeful community. His people may have great respect for this archetype of a hero, but they do not regard him above the sanctified system of law and justice jealously guarded by the ancestral spirits.

One is impressed by this community's love of things in the concrete. Abstractions they abhor. Even when the guardian spirits appear on ceremonial occasions, they do so only symbolically through the living figures of the masked elders. Okonkwo himself is one such privileged person to embody the spirit. His wives, perhaps other women as well, can naturally identify him from his springy walk though his face is hidden behind the impressive mask. But this does not make things different, the spell does not break. An abstract god who lived in the distant skies and singlehanded ruled the universe may have little meaning for them, but their loyalty is unquestioned towards the visible ancestral spirits, oracles and gods' messengers because they are truly involved in their everyday life helping them to maintain their solidarity and ancient pattern of culture. Whether the author wants us to take this 'metaphysical population' seriously is not an important question to ask. They obviously are useful in his art which perfectly endures them and cannot, therefore, be nonsensical. They are visible emblems in Achebe, as in Yeats,—emblems of a special way of life. It is not just a coincidence that Achebe makes one of his ancestral spirits well versed in the symbolic language of Yeats's later poetry. To give a final seal of authority to his utterances this spirit declares: "I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots." An informed reader is free to draw his conclusions regarding his identity.

*Things Fall Apart* is not a record or an analysis of the causes of the historical disaster that befell Nigeria or Iboland. The author presents a coherent artistic pattern to the chaos of related experience. Even the heroic civilization that Achebe has built up with the elements of Umuofia's past cannot endure indefinitely. Things fall

apart not because of the society's inherent 'cracks and weaknesses' as Mr. Palmer would have it, but because all forms of life run through periods of growth, of maturity, then of decline. Yeats had modified this Spenglerian theory of history according to his personal philosophy. He had highlighted the subjective and objective elements of life which, according to him, were always locked in a shifting pattern of conflict. Historically viewed, this could be seen as a continuous conflict between two norms of life, one exalting the heroic qualities, the other glorifying humility and love. Like two gyrating cones, these forces interpenetrated each other, and as Richard Ellmann has explained, the point of one cone or gyre "is the other's base, as if a fifth column were operating in the very headquarters of the enemy. Every moment holds the seeds of its own decay." *Things Fall Apart* does not portray the victory of a superior over an inferior social, political and moral power. The seeds of natural decay were already there, symbolized in the figures of Okonkwo's unheroic father, his weak-kneed though imaginative and introspective elder son, and in the younger brother of his mother who encouraged moderation and tolerance. They cherish non-heroic virtues in the heart of a heroic society. Our archetypal hero, therefore, is shown to be perpetually sad, and always worried about future generations. By the time the white man arrives with his new god and government, new trade and foreign ideals of prosperity, the heroic society of Umuofia has already started to unfold symptoms of uncertainties of purpose. The novel's end does not underline the glory of the triumph of superior alien forces, but a tragic and futile, and a lonely battle of the hero against the inevitable.

At a crucial moment before this final engagement, the hero, as in most epics and heroic tales, has to go on exile. Okonkwo's gun explodes during a ceremonial funeral dance, thus killing a clansman. Everybody accepts it as an accident, a "female crime" but a crime all the same against the very Earth goddess who makes life possible with her bounty. The guilty must flee the land as is the custom, leaving everything he possessed to be thoroughly destroyed by the community, though he might return from the exile after seven long years are terminated. Okonkwo leaves his fatherland with a heavy heart.

Part II of the novel is entirely given to the "wasted and weary years" of exile. The hero passes these years among a distant people—a "womanly clan"—of Uchendu, his mother's brother. Uchendu

is not a converted Christian, but he does not share Okonkwo's heroic ideals either. He urges Okonkwo to realize : "A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in motherland. Your mother is there to protect you." It would, therefore, be wrong to imagine that softer virtues were all imported from the Christian west. The conflict has started in Iboland between the subjective and objective forces of life of a people, and the period of transition must be turbulent. There is nothing in the novel to assure us that Uchendu's tribe finally escaped degradation and agony because it professed non-heroic wisdom. Okonkwo himself does not relent, becomes lonelier than ever, and just before the period of exile is over has an epiphany which explains to him the pattern in the encircling chaos :

As Okonkwo sat in his hut that night, gazing into a log fire, he thought over the matter.... How could he have begotten a son like Nwoye, degenerate and effeminate?... He, Okonkwo, was called a flaming fire. How could he have begotten a woman for a son? At Nwoye's age Okonkwo had already become famous through Umuofia for his wrestling and his fearlessness.

He sighed heavily, and as if in sympathy the smouldering log also sighed. And immediately Okonkwo's eyes were opened and he saw the whole matter clearly. *Living fire begets cold, impotent ash.* He sighed again deeply. (My italics)

He now knows the pattern of history, knows that the 'Second Coming' was imminent, but being an archetypal hero decides not to yield.

The third and final part of the novel brings the hero back from exile to fight his last grim battle, and finally to seek a bitter and most dignified self-destruction. Till the end he holds fast to the humane generosity sanctioned by his ancient culture. He never raises his hands against the intruding white men because they had been given the hospitality that any guest might claim in Iboland. Moreover, since his enemies include members of his own clan, he cannot possibly strike them down. That would again be a crime against the Earth goddess. Things thus are falling apart :

The new religion and government and the trading stores were very much in the people's eyes and minds..... Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which

he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia who had so unaccountably become soft like women.

His people has deserted him, and Okonkwo is alone. Perhaps he remembers the dying words, ambiguous words, of his lazy and unheroic father who loved music :

Do not despair. I know you will not despair. You have a manly and proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter *when a man fails alone.* (My italics)

That difficult and bitter moment of truth has arrived for Okonkwo. It comes to every hero's life. Cuchulain died fighting with the tides. Okonkwo chooses to hang himself from a tree. Implications of such a decision should be remembered by the readers as the hero certainly remembers them. Among the Ibos, self-destruction was also a crime against the Earth goddess. Okonkwo knows for sure that even his best friend in the clan would not even touch his unholy dangling body, nor would he be given a regular grave. He knows he would be buried like a dog in the Evil Forest outside the village. Nothing could have been more moving than this final tragic gesture of the hero.

Is the author sad because the system has fallen apart? Would he have liked to see the old pattern continue? Such questions are irrelevant. No historical moment can ever be recaptured. We may only be allowed to have some insight into its process which may recall for us the glory of man's encounter with the world and with himself. From such a symbolically constructed piece of art we come to realize ; "All things fall apart." Whether the new Iboland can only be built again by "gay" people is probably going to be Chinua Achebe's concern in his future novels. Meanwhile, one receives this great gift from Africa with a sense of humility, gratitude and joy. It has been gloriously shaped with a "consistent moral attitude" of another kind, and it deserves a very close attention.

## FORMS OF TRANSFORMATION

### TWO INDIAN NOVELS

A great deal of the novel criticism of our time is based on the assumption that the emergence of the novel as a literary form in eighteenth century Europe was not an accidental happening. It was the result of changing social and economic conditions and philosophical outlook, and therefore had a certain inevitability in the historical process.

When we study the novel form in India, the above premise leads us to certain ambiguities in critical approach. Educated Indians were subjected to a compulsory English education from 1835 onwards, and when, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the first crop of novels were being written in various Indian languages, the influence of the West, imbibed through the study of Scott, Dickens and minor Victorian popular writers, was quite evident. Ever since then, the critics of the Indian novel have tended to assume that the norms of Western fiction criticism can straight-away be applied to the Indian novel as well, and have praised only those novels which corresponded to the Western model. Certain major Indian works have been ignored or berated by critics simply because these novels did not fit this preconceived pattern. The organic relationship between the form of a novel and the culture that produces it needs to be probed in terms of India, too, and my aim in this paper is to examine only one of the many complex factors that comprise this relationship.

The lack of demonstrable form is one of the commonest charges against the Indian novel.<sup>1</sup> Of the many critics who have lamented this, one is T.W. Clark who, in his English translation (done along with Tarapada Mukherji) of *Pather Panchali*, the Bengali novel by

Bibhutibhushan Banerji, decided to improve upon the original by cutting out one whole section of the work, thereby hoping to achieve a unity of structure which he thought the original had lacked. He justified this by suggesting that the author was a naive genius who did not realize the quality of his own creation, hence had not known where to stop.<sup>3</sup>

This is an outcome of the ambiguity I have referred to above. Clark obviously knows the importance of this major Bengali work, and also knows the meaning of the word *panchali* in the title. *Panchali* refers to a devotional song with a strong story-telling bias, presented over a certain length of time, a form popular even now in rural Bengal. A *panchali* runs on, episode by episode, with no need to arrive at a climax or a terminal point where the entire action has to be resolved and wound up. Yet, instead of seeing in the word *panchali* a clue to the essential form of this narrative, he applies to the work his Western definition of a novel, finds the work flawed, and proceeds to improve it in the translation.

It is an interesting coincidence that the titles of three seminal novels in Bengali of the 1930-50 period indicate an awareness of the traditional pre-novel form of narration. I have in mind *Pather Panchali* (1929, which was made famous outside Bengal when translated into another art-form by the film-maker Satyajit Ray); *Putul Nacher Itikatha* (1936) by Manik Banerji;<sup>3</sup> and *Hansuli Banker Upakatha* (1947) by Tarashankar Banerji.<sup>4</sup> If *panchali* refers to a narrative song, *itikatha* in the second title means chronicle, and *upakatha* in the third means a legend or folk-tale—all three are familiar forms of oral narration. These titles may or may not signify any conscious attempt on the part of these writers to graft a foreign literary form on to an indigenous body of narrative tradition, and none of the authors is known to have made any self-conscious statements about their technique of the kind made by Raja Rao in his preface to *Kanthapura*.<sup>5</sup> Yet the fact remains that these three Bengali novels, along with a number of major novels of the twentieth century in other Indian languages,<sup>6</sup> share a certain attitude towards time as affecting their form of narration which is not to be found easily in their Western counterparts.

The novel form as it developed in the Western world is particularly concerned with time and its effects on man. It presupposes a linear concept of time in which the historical man can be seen to

seek his destiny. Except in highly exceptional works like *Tristram Shandy*, in most novels of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, time is divided and fragmented into measureable units and the contents of each fragment are explored till it is exhausted. The individual existence therefore has a concrete and unique value in the perspective of time. In the Indian narrative tradition, on the other hand, time seems to be undivided as part of the immutable rhythm of the cosmos. It belongs to an absolute sequence which embraces man and the universe in its cyclical repetition. The seasons of the year are an aspect of this principle of eternal renovation, and the renewing of generations is only a part of the cyclical process of the universe. The individual here may not necessarily be the centre of creation.

It is not easy to prove that a different philosophical concept of time results in a change in the form of the novel, especially within the bounds of a short paper like this. Instead of trying to prove anything, I shall only explore the possibility with reference to two of the novels mentioned above. I am leaving out the third because no English translation of this is as yet available.

*Pather Panchali* (1929) was followed by a sequel *Aparajita* (1931), and the two novels together cover three generations and traverse many places, although Apu remains the central consciousness and Nischindipur, his ancestral village, the pivotal place where the narrative begins and to which it returns at the end. At first the two novels may appear to be merely episodic, the presence of Apu the protagonist providing the only connecting thread. But the real unifying device of the two parts emerges gradually. It is a distinct point of view which does not lose its uniqueness even when the child becomes an adult. The theme of the novel is the widening of Apu's consciousness, and if there is any discernible pattern at all, it is in the shape of concentric circles like the ones created by dropping a pebble into still water. At first the house in Nischindipur with the trees around it defines the child's familiar world and all beyond it is mysterious. Then the entire village comes into focus, the distant railway tracks symbolizing its limits. As Apu grows older he crosses this boundary to discover fresh wonders outside, and the third section of *Pather Panchali* (the part left out by Clark in the English translation) deals with his life in Banaras. By the end of the second volume the frontiers are pushed back much further: Apu's ship has left for Fiji, Samoa and even less known islands. But Apu's

unique vision of delight and wonder remains the central point of these widening circles.

For Apu the temporal and the spatial boundaries are not very distinct. The road he had once seen as a child led, he was told, to the ferry at Dholchite. But he knew that it actually went all the way to the land of the epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The grown-up Apu's voyage at the end of the second volume passed from real places on the map to "a quest for gold in the sunken ships of Porto Plata" beyond the cartographer's realm. The real and the mythical, the immediate and the remote, the past and the present, all things mingle in a continuum in Apu's mind.

*Pather Panchali* in the original Bengali has three sections : the first dealing with the time before Apu's birth, where his old widowed aunt figures prominently ; the second and the major section deals with Apu's boyhood in Nischindipur ; the third with his life after leaving the village. If the English translation leaves out the third section, the German and the Russian translations leave out the third as well as the first presumably because they were deemed irrelevant to the central narrative. Such arbitrary editing violates the rhythm of the original novel where a different concept of time regulates action. The song (*panchali*) is not limited to Apu's life alone— it stretches backwards and forwards to make past and present parts of an unfolding pattern. The death of the old widowed aunt, preceded by Apu's birth, indicates a natural rhythm, setting the tone for the rest of the chapters. The road on which Apu travels began long before his birth and will continue beyond the bounds of a well-made tale.

We may recall that the end of the *Odyssey* is not the end of a long journey but the beginning of another. George Lukacs called this "a reflection of the true epic mentality's total indifference to any form of architectural construction."<sup>7</sup> The Greek epics derived their completeness from their own organic view of life and no reader expects from them the neat construction expected of the novel form. The novel in India, too, the truly seminal ones, derive their vitality from a view of life where time has a different kind of reality. There is no logical progression of events in *Pather Panchali* ; in terms of plot no action really leads to another. Yet the life-base which supports *Pather Panchali* is neither timeless nor mythical, and each moment has a pure significance in the cyclic movement wherein the changing seasons become the metaphor of human life.



The second novel under discussion, *Putul Nacher Itikatha*, strikes the reader from the beginning as a total contrast to *Pather Panchali*, though both the novels are set in rural Bengal. Manik Banerji's clinical detachment is markedly different from Bibhutibhushan's all-inclusive empathy. Apu in Bibhutibhushan is an inalienable part of his environment; Shashi, the central figure of *Putul Nacher Itikatha*, has suffered a severe wrench. He had been to the city to be trained as a doctor, and then made a conscious decision to come back to his village Gaodia and practise medicine there. Back in the village, he wavers between his loyalty to the place and people and his revulsion from them. Manik Banerji presents human relationships and situations in a stark manner without any comforting illusions. In his work as a doctor Shashi has minor successes, small failures, frequent frustrations, but he keeps dreaming of a larger future, until in the end he is forced to accept his limited lot.

The term *itikatha* in the title is vindicated if one regards the book as the chronicle of the village Gaodia where through death and marriage and birth the cycle of life continues inexorably. Shashi's failure to bring about any change in the village community might lead one to conclude that the basic pattern of the *itikatha* stresses just continuity and survival, not change and development.

But as in *Pather Panchali* the apparent looseness or episodic nature of the narrative is deceptive, because there is an organic relationship among the various parts. Certain motifs and symbols recur, each finding its place in the movement of seasons. Gaodia's resistance to change is epitomized in its stagnant ponds. In this static world the only things that grow are wild grass and rank weeds which engulf all human attempt to conquer nature. By contrast, the palm grove is the only spot where the surroundings do not stifle Shashi. Significantly enough, this is the place where all genuinely human and positive events in the novel take place. This is where Shashi and Kusum meet; this is where Moti loses her gold ear-rings but finds a 'disguised prince' instead. Only in this place is the individual not secondary to or overawed by the community. Beyond this palm grove, which embodies all that is meaningful in human relationship, is a mound which Shashi climbs to look at the sunset. He climbs, as it were, above personal relationships and has a vision of himself alone in relation to the universe. This vision never returns but the memory of it is referred to a few times in the novel to

provide a structural strut. At the end of the novel, after Shashi has lost all illusions and is reconciled to living on a less intense level, we are told : 'He does not go to the palm grove any more. He never climbs the mound to see the sunset. Never in his life will he want to do that again.' (p. 250)

Behind the motifs of marsh, swamp and bamboo clumps, behind symbolic acts like Kusum trampling the rose bush or Shashi climbing the mound, there is a clearly visible movement of seasons, giving the novel an internal rhythm. Passage of time becomes a palpable process and this is woven into the *itikatha* beginning with a rainy season, and proceeding through the cycles of autumn and winter. Nature is viewed not with the lyrical rapture one finds in *Pather Panchali* but in a matter of fact manner. Here for example is a passage describing the onset of winter :

The cold weather intensifies.

The samkranti is not very far. The village is full of the sounds of the husking of grain. The sun does not scorch any more but the rabi crops in the field grow green and lusty. People have begun to feel a dryness upon their skin. When they scratch, the skin looks chalky. Quilts are being brought out, chinks in the bamboo walls are being stuffed with rags and paper. Moti nearly had another bout of fever. Kusum had one more of her stomach aches. Paran has managed to sell off one lot of the molasses he had prepared. Now he intends to make some date-palm jaggery and wants to borrow money from Shashi to lease forty trees for this purpose. (p. 78)

The passage is jerky, factual and detached, enumerating information rather than trying to create a mood. Winter is presented in terms of a physician's professed concerns as well as in other precise details of work-a-day life. Earlier we have seen the rains being associated with cholera and snakebite, autumn with malaria. That disease and seasonal change are inextricably associated in the Indian villager's mind can also be noted in the naming of certain diseases (the word for small-pox in Bengali is the same as for the spring season, perhaps because they come almost together) and also in the deification of some particularly dreaded diseases (Sitala, the small-pox goddess ; Ola-bibi, the cholera goddess). Shashi's awareness of the seasons in terms of his professional concerns not only makes nature concrete and vivid, it also lends validity to the protagonist's point of view.

There is another kind of unity achieved through the way each

episode reiterates one central theme – the ironic gap between man's intention and his achievement. Shashi starts with unbounded optimism and a naive faith that by mere good intentions he can improve other peoples' lives. But each of his attempts rebounds upon him. His sister Bindu whom he tried to rescue from a disastrous marriage eventually returns to her despicable husband; Sen-didi, a beautiful neighbour whose life Shashi tried so hard to save, is ruined in a different way; and Kusum, the woman he loved, is estranged for ever. As a doctor Shashi should have been a positive life-promoting agent. Yet paradoxically, though he had his measure of professional successes, in his private life he undid most of his triumph over death. This ironic pattern holds the episodes together, giving the novel an internal unity.

There is nothing naive in this highly sophisticated work, yet the *itikatha* structure is re-affirmed at the ending. Shashi's disillusionment was necessary in a society whose main strength lies in its unchangeability. Unlike a Western novel where time and space are the fundamental axes and specific historical actions produce discernible developments leading to a climax, the *itikatha* has an a-temporal element, where action is a mirage, continuity the vital essence.

No generalization can be based on the evidence of two novels. The novels discussed here are sufficiently dissimilar in tone, theme and technique to indicate that the individual vision of the writer is perhaps more important than tradition. Yet even this individual vision is conditioned by subterranean cultural implications and philosophic assumptions.

In India modernization and westernization are almost synonymous terms, and because the novel is a relatively modern literary art form, it has more or less been taken for granted that works in the novel form should be judged by standards emerging in the West. And indeed the nineteenth century novels in India were directly derived from western novels. But a borrowed form cannot really take root in another culture unless in course of time it is naturalized in the existing tradition of that culture. Some of the important Indian novels written in our time show this process at work.

The novels briefly examined here seem to me to be two different examples of this delayed fusion. A genre which emerged in Europe in a particular economic, historic and philosophic context, becomes

in the subsequent centuries a vehicle for embodying the views of life in another context with consequent mutations in the form. The analysis of this fusion has to be tentative because none of the elements are static. While Indian tradition has never been monolithic, the nature of Western borrowing has also been changing over the years. Also, while we unravel these fragile strands, the very concept of the novel and ideas about time and man are undergoing change in India as well as in the West.

#### NOTES

[Another article on these very two novels was published in vol. 10. The approaches, however, are entirely different. — Ed.]

- 1 Among critics who have commented on this lack of a sense of climax and apparent formlessness in the Indian novel are David McCutcheon (in his discussion of Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*), Gordon Roadarmal (in the introductory note to his translation of Premchand's *Godan*), and Edwin Gerow (in his analysis of R. K. Narayan's novels).
- 2 See Introduction, *Pather Panchali : Song of the Road* (London, 1968), p. 16.
- 3 The Unesco sponsored translation of this novel, entitled, *The Puppet's Tale* (trans. Sachindralal Ghosh, ed. Arthur Isenberg), was published by Sahitya Akademi in 1968 ; it has been reprinted in 1977.  
I have taken the liberty of translating from the original Bengali whenever I have needed to cite the text ; but for the convenience of readers in English, reference has been made to the published translation.
- 4 No English translation of this novel is available yet. A literal translation of the title would be : 'The legend of the village at the bend of the Hansuli river'. That the last name of all three of these writers is Banerji (orig. Bandyopadhyay) is a mere coincidence. It is a fairly common surname in Bengal.
- 5 In his foreword to *Kanthapura* (first pub. 1937), Raja Rao explained his narrative style thus : ". . . and our paths are interminable. *The Mahabharata* has 214,778 verses and *the Ramayana* 48000. Puranas there are endless and innumerable. We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous 'ats' and 'ons' to bother us — we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story telling. I have tried to follow it in this story."
- 6 To cite a few examples : *Marali Mannige* (1940) in Kannada by K. S. Karanth ; *Paraja* (1945) in Oriya by Gopinath Mahanty ; *Maila Anchal* (1954) in Hindi by Phanishwarnath Renu ; *Chemmeen* (1955) in Malayalam by Thakazhi Shivashankar Pillai.
- 7 See Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. from the German by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

## *MAHABHARATER KATHA*

[ This is a translation of a Bengali modern classic, *Mahabharater Katha*, a critical and interpretative work on the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* by Buddhadeva Bose. Founder Chairman of the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur, Professor Bose died when the book was being printed in 1974. The first part of the translation was printed in the last volume of *JJCL*.]

### FIVE : IN SEARCH OF A HERO

I know I am not saying anything new. In the preface to his abridged translation of the *Mahābhārata*, Rājsekhar Basu also identifies Yudhistir as the hero and central male character. We shall now have to examine the premises on which Yudhistir's role as hero can rest. Generally, we regard him as weak and lacking in any initiative, as perpetually dependent on the prowess of Bhim or Arjun and on the advice of Krishna, as wholly unable to take any step without consulting Krishna or Vidur or his own brothers, nearly as undecided as Dhritarastra and, despite his piety, guilty of unbelievable moral lapses. How shall we accept such a person as a hero? His personality is so wanting in attractiveness that no poet from Kalidas to Rabindranath has ever composed a *kavya* or *natak* with Yudhistir as the central figure. There is no dearth of people named Partha or Sabyasachi in modern Bengal, but it would be difficult to find an upper-caste Hindu named 'Yudhistir'. In Bengali usage, the epithet 'Dharmaputra Yudhistir' (Yudhistir, the son of Dharma) has a derogatory meaning. It is clear that Yudhistir possesses none of the characteristics of an epic hero. His development in the work is also very slow. No such statement like 'Sing, goddess, the anger of Achilles' or 'Who is there in the world at the same time learned, accomplished and brave in battle' announces his appearance. When the story begins his role is

lamentably insignificant. Bhim or Arjun or Duryodhan project themselves brightly even while the sons of Dhritarastra and Pandu are mere boys. They are already trained gymnasts, full of vigour ; their fate clearly anticipated. But we do not find Yudhistir participating in those healthy exercises like sprinting, jumping or swimming. He is more of a type who stays indoors hovering near his mother. We are told that under Drona's tutelage he became an expert charioteer, but there is no evidence anywhere in the *Mahābhārata* of Yudhistir's ever having demonstrated this skill. As for his skill at arms, the less said about it the better. If any pupil had failed to graduate in Drona's school he is Yudhistir. Urged by the master at the archery tests when he failed to fix his sight upon the artificial bird set up on a tree, but saw everything, the target as well as the tree *and* his teacher and *his* brothers, at the sametime, Drona dismissed him in no uncertain terms : 'Give up, you are worthless' (*Ādi*, 132). He is mostly overshadowed in youth by the feats of Bhim and Arjun ; and first attracts our notice in *Ādiparva* when Vidur, who has come to know of Duryodhan's wicked plan, tells Yudhistir in a code language how to escape from being burned alive in the cottage of lac (*Ādi*, 145). That he at all understood Vidur's message in a strange lingo was his only credit. As for what had to be done before and after that incendiary affair was taken care of entirely and alone by Bhim, with the aid of his powerful and confident pair of arms. From here until the end of *Ādiparva*, Bhim and Arjun occupy our attention, especially Arjun, who does not stop with the winning of Draupadi, but collects Subhadra as well, nor does ignore Ulupi and Chitrangada as temporary companions. Even Bhim, whom we do not normally regard as a philanderer, finds a companionable female in passing—not a princess but a *rākṣasī*, which probably suited him better. All this while Yudhistir remains satisfied with the fifth share of one woman,<sup>1</sup> satisfied in a rather abstemious and asexual manner—or so it seems to us. The most insignificant warrior of the Kuru clan, he is also an unworthy progeny of Dusyanta and Santanu in amour.

And there is no doubt that he is the least notable king in history. We are told in *Āśramvāsik-parva* that he ruled for thirty-six years after the great battle was over. But that he ruled only in name, that the actual ruling was done by Vidur, is made sufficiently clear. Also, there is no account of kingship in action in this book of the

*Mahābhārata*. There is a farewell tone in this part which acts as preamble to the great departure that is to follow. Only once — and that very briefly, in Sabhāparva — we see Yudhistir as king, but not in any kingly or glorious action. Rather, we find him, in spite of Narada's counsel (*Sabhā*, 5), unable to overcome his characteristic timidity, mildness and circumambulatory tendencies, and grasp the political motivation underlying the decisions of a king. Narada's query—'O King, are you being distracted from thoughts of *dharma* by having to think of *artha*?'—sounds very much like a jibe because we have known, ever since Ādiparva, that Yudhistir is not in the least inclined towards wealth. There are many words of approbation about his reign in Sabhāparva, but there is no indication that apart from the welfare of his subjects any other regal aspiration ever touched him. This may have been pleasing to his subjects but not enough to his well-wishers. Arjun had to voice the thought that royal duties remain unfulfilled unless a king goes to war and expands territory (*Sabhā*, 24). Evidently Yudhistir agreed, but not with much enthusiasm, and only because it was not in his nature to firmly protest. His brothers and his courtiers persuaded him that he was fit to be a king of kings, hence entitled to hold a *rājasūya yajña* (*Sabhā*, 12). Yudhistir's worry on hearing this is proof enough of his lack of confidence, in what others said specially about him, even in his own ability.<sup>2</sup> It is advisable for kings to seek proper counsel in any undertaking, but Yudhistir seems almost addicted to consultation, he cannot take a political decision on his own. Approved of the priest Dhoumya, of several divines and sages, even of Narada himself who also carried directives from his dead father Pandu,— all these promptings failed to overcome his misgivings, and finally Krishna had to come all the way from Dwarka to persuade him to hold the *yajña*. Yet, throughout the description we get of the *rājasūya yajña*, Yudhistir is mentioned only in the passive voice: he is not the organiser of any events, only the beneficiary; not an executor, but an excuse. When the other four brothers set out on *digvijay*, (a subjugating expedition) he stays back in Indraprastha; the plot to kill Jarasandha frightens him but he makes no attempt to deter Krishna. In this way, entirely as a result of great enterprise and toil of others, he obtains the title of *rājcakravartī*— for which he himself had expressed no eagerness—and that throne to which he has been carried almost bodily by his four warlike brothers and a diplomat,

Krishna. We are amused, even feel some pity, when at the rumblings of the angry Kings of the Sisupal faction attending the *yajña*, this recently crowned sovereign turns anxiously to Bhishma for succour. It is at once clear that all of them from Dhoumya to Krishna had been fit to wear the crown, but not Yudhisthir, never Yudhisthir.

Up to this point he still enjoys our respect, perhaps even some affection, because he is such a harmless soul. Probably we remember that he had prevented the killing of Hidimba by Bhim and of Angarparna by Arjun. Already, though, several other slayings, including that of a woman,<sup>3</sup> have come to recognize him as somebody nowhere nearly as ruthless as Arjun or Bhim. When soon after this, at a critical moment, this inert, innocuous, non-aggressive person, whom we have known so far as timid, indecisive and panicky, suddenly turns into a wildly irresponsible gambler, we are taken wholly by surprise. And when we see him sitting quietly after the disaster, unresponsive to the stinging scorn of the Kauravs, unmoved by the agitation of his younger brothers, indifferent to the sorrow of his tearful mother—when we see him, further, bid farewell in very few words to Bhishma and other elders and set off to the forest-exile without a sign of regret—we do not know what to make of the man : is he obtuse or patient, dazed or detached, insane or inanimate ? The question arises in our minds : has the terrible blow turned him into stone or has it not even touched him ?

The answer to this question dawns on us, first slowly but then gradually quite convincingly, as we follow him into the forest, walk behind his steady strides, listen to what he says and also what he himself listens to. Yudhisthir's fondness for the dice is not quite what European critics regard as tragic 'flaw'. He is also much above the Aristotelian pity and terror. We have to note that the game of dice does not bring about his fall— or, if it does it is only from his worldly status, not from his character. His moral nature, instead of undergoing any disintegration, unfolds itself, develops, and achieves fullness simply as a result of the forest-exile caused by the game of dice and then of the battle which follows.<sup>4</sup> It may not be too much to assert that in some corner of his mind, in the depth of his subconscious, that is what he had longed for, this release : from the Indrapuri built by Moydanav, from the shackles of ceremony and splendour, from the stifling enormity of wealth and plenty, and, above all, release from the kind of political intrigue which caused the



deaths of Jarasandha and Sisupal. Yudhisthir had wanted before the inevitable great battle,<sup>1</sup> a spell of respite in order to live as a mere human being. But how was that to be, with so many people around him, so many eyes watching him all the time? Isn't this the most likely reason of his acute passion for dice, of his sudden and unexpected self-oblivion? It may well be that what is for us a painful episode, was for him the only means of or pretext for escape—the only way available to him? But nothing on this earth can be had for nothing. As the price of this release he was to accept one remorse as his constant companion in exile, not so much for his own sake as for the sake of his near ones who accompanied him. But even this sorrow was necessary in his life, as we shall see in the Vanaparva. Yudhisthir's true identity begins to become apparent to us from Vanaparva onwards.

#### NOTES

- 1 In the account of the Puru dynasty there is mention of another wife of Yudhisthir's and a son by her (*Ādi*, 95 : Aryasastra ed.), but only a passing mention—we never meet this wife or the son.
- 2 [The author has quoted the verse *Sabhā*, 13, 28 here, given a Bengali translation as well, and suggested that Yudhisthir's 'competence' referred to in the verse is actually his lack of 'competence'.]
- 3 Before escaping from the house of lac, the Pandavs burned down a nishad woman and her five sons. The text does not state specifically that Yudhisthir knew about this, but we shall have to assume that he did. Nowhere else in the *Mahābhārata* is there another instance of such a needless slaughter of innocents.
- 4 Compare Oedipus. The 'hubris' or pride or obstinacy that causes his outward downfall also brings about his inner triumph, when as a blind old beggar being led by his daughter, he arrives at Colonus, then disappears mysteriously from the face of the earth.

Other examples of moral downfall as a result of gambling has been depicted in the *Mahābhārata*. Between Nala's abandonment of Damayanti, and Yudhisthir's constant regret about the misery of his four brothers and Draupadi—a distinct contrast should be noticed.

- 5 At the conclusion of the *rājasūya yajña*, instead of congratulating Yudhisthir, Vyasadev conveys a sad prospect : 'Listen, Yudhisthir. You will be the occasion of the destruction of ksatriya kings in due course. You will have a dream before dawn : Sankara, bearing trident and trumpet, will be looking in the southern direction at the realm ruled by Yama. Yet do not worry, son. May only good happen to you.'

We are not told whether Yudhisthir actually had had this dream predicted by Vyasa,

## SIX : AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING

The *Mahābhārata* is eight times longer than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* put together ; the Vanaparva alone is as long as the *Iliad*. Only the Śāntiparva, replete with didactic tales, exceeds the Vanaparva in length. But if we were to add the Udyogaparva to the Virāṭaparva, abounding in episodes, again add the Bhīṣmaparva to Udyoga, then the aggregate would equal the extent of Vana. Even more noteworthy is the curious feature of Vana that it contains very few incidents which happen there and then. Much of its expanse is taken up by one *upākhyāna* (episode) after another about events that have already happened and are now being related. Why should there be such frequent excursions back into the past, especially at points where the plot has reached a stage of suspense and there is every reason to go forward rather than back ? While it is true that this device makes room permanently for a number of captivating tales, is there any connection between these tales and the main story ?

At some stage we cannot help recalling another purāṇic personage, whose place in the popular mind is second only to that of Kṛṣṇa, and who also went into forest-exile with his wife and brother, and spent fourteen years away from home. There is a superficial similarity between these two stories of forest-exile but their essential qualities are quite dissimilar, as becomes clear by comparing Yudhiṣṭhira and Rāma. Both stories originate in the upholding of *satya*, but the natures of *satya* in either case are quite different. The reason for exile came about without Rāma's knowledge, whereas Yudhiṣṭhira caused his own exile. Where Rāma merely went away from his realm, Yudhiṣṭhira lost his kingdom ; where Rāma went willingly to the forest, Yudhiṣṭhira was unambiguously exiled. Daśaratha and many others tried to dissuade Rāma from going away ; about Yudhiṣṭhira's departure there was general expression of regret but no attempt to stop it, simply because there was no way to stop it. Yudhiṣṭhira had to go, not on account of the machinations of a jealous mother or because his weak-willed father had given his word to a favoured wife, but as the consequence of his own action. Neither Duryodhana's envy nor Śakuni's duplicity makes his action forgivable, because he could easily not have engaged in that game of dice

—and that wicked game was played not just once, but two times. When at long last he acted on his own initiative, he reduced his brothers to beggars and made Draupadī miserable. He cannot forget that he alone is to blame, and occasionally his dear relations remind him about this.<sup>1</sup> Whatever sorrows Rāma suffered in exile were all from outside sources, never from any inner unhappiness; Yudhiṣṭhira, on the other hand, is troubled not by external issues but by his own self-mortification. Besides, Araṇyakāṇḍa moves steadily in the direction of the abduction of Sitā. The episode concerning the rākṣasa Virādha in the second canto foreshadows this; from then to the advent of Śūrpaṇakhā, we rapidly approach the crisis. There is no such episodic purpose in the Vanaparva.<sup>2</sup> If there is any, it is not structural; it is concealed, not overt; psychological, not instrumental. And it concerns only Yudhiṣṭhira's life, nobody else's.

Let us review the activities of Rāma in Araṇyakāṇḍa and also consider what preoccupies Yudhiṣṭhira in Vanaparva. We can see Rāma combining the roles of Bhīma and Arjuna, but there is no trace of Yudhiṣṭhira in his conduct. With Lakṣmaṇa in support, he kills many rākṣasas and obtains god-given weapons from the sage Agastya. During his ten years of wandering<sup>3</sup> he comes across many munis and rishis but never asks them any questions, never seeks any enlightenment from them—except information on which particular forest would be suitable to settle in. In the fourteenth canto Jaṭāyu tells him a creation story in brief. From that Rāma deduces the amiable relations which existed between his father and Jaṭāyu, but expressed no curiosity about the thesis of creation. Leaving Sitā in Jaṭāyu's care, he goes off with Lakṣmaṇa to set up a dwelling place in the Pañcavaṭi forest. If the reader were to recall the account of another creation story (*Vana*, 188)—where Yudhiṣṭhira goes sequentially from question to question with no other motive than that of intellectual curiosity—he will realize how very dissimilar these two epic heroes are.

Both were of kṣatriya lineage, both underwent much suffering, but Rāma was naturally and integrally everything that Yudhiṣṭhira was not or could not become. Industrious, warlike, fearless and unhesitating, Rāma grasped politics easily and took decisions quickly when faced with danger. Resourceful, a good organizer, endowed with unlimited self-confidence, in every way Rāma is qualified to be a leader of men. And these bright aspects are the other side of

Rāma as lover—a great and praiseworthy lover. From the abduction of Sītā right up to the end of Kiṣkindhyā-kāṇḍa, that part of Rāma the lover is revealed again and again in inconsolable pangs of separation, whose echoes can be heard in the *Meghadūta* and the *Raghuvamśa*. But this excess of sorrow does not disable him at any point ; he carries out timely actions without error. His marksmanship remains deadly whenever a rākṣasa is within the range of his bow. There is no flagging in his search for the abducted one. Whoever he meets on the way, like Kabandha released from a curse or Jaṭāyu on the point of death, gives him news which furthers his objective. He has no compunction in killing Bāli by unfair means, because an alliance with Sugriva was essential. At the same time, we see him thrilled in all his senses on the banks of the Pampā ; when the rains come to Kiṣkindhyā and autumn's beauty follows the rains, his description of the change of seasons reveals him as one truly in love with nature. But preparations for war begin as the Kiṣkindhyā-kāṇḍa concludes, and we find Rāma re-assuming his activist role. These two strains, sometimes in alternation and sometimes in combination, mark the course of Rāma's forest wanderings. One befits the brave warrior, the other becomes the sensitive lover— and both roles are glorious.

How does Yudhiṣṭhira compare with him ? Is he as perplexed in being deprived of his kingdom as Rāma is in being separated from his beloved ? Not a bit. We do not even expect it of him. But there are many subjects unrelated to war or politics which produced unalloyed pleasure— no such subject seems to stir him, and this indifference cannot but surprise and disappoint us. Like Rāma, he too wanders from one forest to another, watches the six seasons change each into the next one twelve times, sees any number of rivers, mountains, lakes, rows of trees, leaves, birds, beasts— but not for once does he show any pleasure in nature, never is he brought up short by a view, nor does he ever notice whether it is spring or the rainy season on earth. For him it seems that the earth has no seasonal change, is devoid of colour and odour.<sup>4</sup> What then does he do during Vanaparva, how does he spend those twelve long years ?

His main activity, it would appear, was listening. Not that on occasion he does not speak, but certainly he listens much more. Listening seems to be his work as well as his predilection. Yudhiṣṭhira's listening is the main incident of the Vanaparva. He has

to listen to the angry laments of fiery Draupadī, to the rebukes and rash exhortation of violence-loving Bhīma. What he listens to on his own volition—eagerly, with great thirst, all the time—is to purāṇa lore imparted by the munis (sages). What they have to tell does not consist of the hoary history of the descendants of Bharata, nor is it the traditional eulogy of ancestors, but the ageless and unfading tales through which we gain entrance into the inner life of the universe—and discern an elusive point of radiance located very far from the familiar blueness and greenery so pleasing to us. The text says that these stories were told in order to console Yudhiṣṭhira, but we realize that, transcending mere solace, outstripping his wretched memory of a game of dice, a sensation almost like pleasure is pouring into his being. This pleasure is not like the sense-indulgence enjoyed by Rāma and we cannot even say that Yudhiṣṭhira is pleased. But slowly there seems to grow amid this secret and unrecognized joy a feeling that he is beginning to be, beginning to be truly himself.

According to the text he was not alone before the tale-telling munis. Three or four of his brothers were present,<sup>6</sup> so must have been Draupadī at hand occasionally. But in canto after canto, Lomaśa or Bṛhadaśva or Mārkaṇḍeya is asked questions only by Yudhiṣṭhira, their main auditor, and their replies are addressed only to him. This happens not because he is the eldest. There is enough proof in the conduct of the others that they hear without listening, that they are not interested. And on the final day of the forest-exile, when Yudhiṣṭhira confronts the mysterious crane, only then do we realize that this forest—where Draupadī had spent her days in perpetual discontent, while Bhīma and Arjuna were constantly engaged in combat with others—was something like a school for Yudhiṣṭhira. At this institution of higher learning he received instruction for twelve years from the greatest teachers—instruction not in the use of arms or in the acquisition of orthodox learning, but in the ways of self-searching and self-discovery through which the meaning of the universe can be grasped. Before he leaves this high school, on the eve of his return to ordinary life, Yudhiṣṭhira has to pass a test conducted by a god in disguise. This is not his final examination nor his first, but it is so central that it merits detailed discussion.

## NOTES

- 1 The game of dice is mentioned four times in Vanaparva. Once Draupadī, unable to bear her misery, asks Yudhiṣṭhira, 'O King, there is no man as mild, pliable, shy, generous and truthful as you. How did you get involved in the wicked indulgence of dice?' (Chap. 30) Yudhiṣṭhira does not answer immediately, but when Bhīma provokes him sufficiently, he states : I gambled hoping to wrest the kingdom from Duryodhana, but so Śakuni defeated me by trickery. . . . The second time Śakuni angered me greatly that I could not restrain myself.' (Chap. 34) These are his own words, but we can hardly believe him, perhaps Bhīma does not either. That Yudhiṣṭhira was capable of fits of anger we shall see on a few occasions later, but there is no evidence of this during the games of dice. As for his desire to wrest the kingdom, is this the third *ripu* ? The most detailed scrutiny of Yudhiṣṭhira's career will not reveal a single moment when he can be suspected of lusting after a kingdom (for that matter, of any other kind of lust). Here he is plainly offering a ready-made excuse to cover up his feeling of guilt.

The third reference to Yudhiṣṭhira's gambling comes when Arjuna is about to leave on his journey to obtain arms (Chap. 52). At this point Bhīma's accusation is direct and biting : 'Although we are strong, we have been reduced to this poor state because of you. . . . Because of your gambling, we are wasting ourselves.' Yudhiṣṭhira does not offer a lame excuse this time as he did earlier, but turns to the newly arrived sage Bṛhadāśva and appeals to him : 'I have no skill in dice. These skilful players cheated and robbed me of my kingdom. And harsh references to that disaster depress me greatly. What my well-wishers said at that time pains me night and day as I recall their words. Wise one, have you seen or heard of a more luckless king than I ?' In reply, Yudhiṣṭhira is told the story of Nala and Damayanti.

Much later, towards the end of the forest-exile, Yudhiṣṭhira makes one more reference to the game of dice. It may be recalled in this connection that addiction to dice was one of the chief indulgences of the Aryans of India. More than one *sūkta* of the *Atharva-veda* (4 : 38, 7 : 52, 114) refer to this ; the celebrated "Lament of the gambler" verses of *Rgveda* may be read as a precursor of what happened in the *Sabhāparva*. [The author has provided at this point a simplified retelling of Romesh Chunder Dutt's Bengali translation of these verses (*Rk* : 10 : 34).] There was no currency during the time of the *Rgveda* and there is no evidence that currency had come into use at the time of the *Mahābhārata*. Wealth at that time still meant land, cows, gold and other commodities, as well as members of the household like servants and relations including wives. Staking one's own wife in a fit of a gambling craze need not therefore seem improbable, though it would be regarded as immoral even then while it seems inconceivable to our modern thinking.

- 2 It need not be stressed that there is no comparison between the abduction

of Sītā by Rāvaṇa and the kidnapping of Draupadī by Jayadratha. The latter episode is embryonic and devoid of consequences. The Pāṇḍavas do not even remember the incident when they organize the killing of Jayadratha in *Droṇaparva*. A closer comparison to Sītā's abduction would be the molestation of Draupadī by the Kauravas after the game of dice. However, the reason for the *Māhābhārata* war is not a woman but land.

- 3 The eleventh sarga of *Aranyakāṇḍa* mentions ten years (sloka 12) ; soon after this Śūrpaṇakhā enters the scene.
- 4 We may say that the difference lies really between Vyāsa and Vālmiki. But at the moment we are not discussing them but the two characters created by them.
- 5 Arjuna was absent from the second to the sixth year of exile, away on his travels in the heavenly regions in order to obtain arms.

That Yudhiṣṭhira is the main and only listener throughout the *Vanaparva* is proved from two incidents. During the question-answer bout between the giant python and Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma was present and the exchange must have continued even after his release ; but we hear not a word from Bhīma, we do not even know whether he heard what was being said. Similarly, when Dharma revealed himself after the ordeal by the lake was over, the four other brothers have all been revived and should all be there ; but we are given no specific evidence of their presence, nor of whether the whole episode has meant anything to them.

## SEVEN : PREFIGURATION

Yudhiṣṭhira was no inspired Naciketas ; he did not have it in him to reach the higher realm of the gods at one jump. His advance must be deliberate, he has to move circuitously, sometimes with the help of another to show him the way. Naciketas reached the gods by the sheer impulse, as it were, of his resolution. There is no such sudden thrust behind Yudhiṣṭhira's being tested by the lakeside. There are at least three prior intimations of this in the *Vanaparva*. All three originate in the resuscitation of someone dead or seemingly dead, and what is needed in all three cases for the success of the act of resuscitation is wisdom from learning, maturity of speech— neither the muscular strength of Herakles nor Arjuna's skill in archery. Readers will recall the son of a muni (sage)—the central character of the most

important tale told to Yudhiṣṭhira— who, even while he was in his mother's womb, had had occasion to correct his father on a point of scholarship, and thereby earned a curse which caused him to be born 'bent-in-eight-places'. Yet, at the age of ten and in spite of his physical handicap, he had rescued his curse-giving father from drowning by the application of his acquired wisdom (*Vana*, 132-34). The debating contests between this boy and, first, the doorkeeper, then King Janaka, and finally the court-pandit Bandī can be regarded as the first draft of the exchanges between the crane and Yudhiṣṭhira.<sup>1</sup>

The second instance is even more clearly similar. Here Yudhiṣṭhira is himself present in the action and has to answer several questions in order to win back the life of a brother (*Vana*, 180-81). Of course, Nahuṣa in the guise of a serpent is a far milder examiner than Dharma in the guise of a crane, and is content with satisfactory answers to only three questions before he releases Bhima. It is noticeable that a brother's life being spared gives no occasion to Yudhiṣṭhira for expressing any particular joy. He is more interested in learning and picking up a few items of knowledge, and thus getting a few more hints about the right direction, from the store of wisdom represented by this python-bodied veda-knowing sage. Much later, after many other tales have been told, Yudhiṣṭhira hears the strange story of Sāvitrī, in which Yama himself is outwitted by a young woman of felicitous speech (*Vana*, 292-96). Following soon after comes the test set by Dharma.<sup>2</sup>

Testing by the question-answer method, it need not be stressed, is an ancient practice. At least three of the upaniṣads— *Kena*, *Praśna*, and *Śvetāśvatara*— are structured on these lines. Inquiry into the nature of *brahman* is not the main concern of the *Mahābhārata* and there are many question-answer episodes in it of no particular significance. But in these three instances— the disputation by Aṣṭāvakra, the exchange between Yudhiṣṭhira and the python, and Sāvitrī's well-chosen arguments— form a clear line of ascending significance. The first is hardly more than a testing of rote-memory, also a little of quick-wittedness. Some of the questions addressed by Janaka to Aṣṭāvakra and by Aṣṭāvakra to Bandī are like conundrums, while some others are like superior versions of oral riddles used to amuse children. When the court-pandit of Janaka cannot find more than two examples for number thirteen and has to admit defeat, the contest declines almost to the level of a farce. But in the second in-



stance we find evidence of independent thinking in the statements made by Yudhiṣṭhira. In the third, all that Sāvitrī says seems to have no other source but her own intelligence and emotions. Even then, as with Nahuṣa so with Yama, we get the impression that the supplicant gets what he or she wants rather easily. Yudhiṣṭhira's ordeal is much more exacting and comprehensive.

It begins with his having to deal with a prohibitory order. This is not the first time that such an order has had to be faced. In *Ādi-parva*, as the Pāṇḍavas were travelling from Ekacakrā to Pañcāla, Arjuna was halted by a similar pronouncement, on the bank of another stretch of water (*Ādi*, 170). Day had just come to an end. Arjuna led the party, torch in hand, with Kuntī and his four brothers following behind, and in front flowed the Gaṅgā. A resounding utterance came suddenly : 'What imprudent travellers are you who know not that the night hours belong to the yakṣa and rakṣasa and gandharva ? From dusk to dawn, no man may enter this water. I am the gandharva king Aṅgāraparṇa and this river is now under my occupation. Turn you back.' The way Arjuna spurned this prohibition, fought and overcame Aṅgarparṇa in combat and ultimately received invaluable gifts from him, reveals the very essence of Arjuna's character. No less revealing, on the later occasion, is Yudhiṣṭhira's reaction, when he hastens to obey the crane's prohibition.

Arjuna had in fact faced a prohibitory directive once earlier—during the first year of the forest-exile—when, in a jungle bordering the Himalaya, a kirāta contests his right to kill a boar (*Vana*, 39-40). 'I have aimed my arrow first at this beast, therefore you must refrain,' claims the hunter, but Arjuna refutes the claim with his usual arrogance. This adversary is somewhat more able than Aṅgāraparṇa and, unable to withstand the strength of the hunter's hands gripping him, Arjuna falls to the ground like one dead. But that too was a test and the tester was again a benevolent god ; hence Arjuna emerges unscathed and is, in fact, rewarded for his impertinence, as it were, by receiving the boon of a god-given weapon. When the lakeside confrontation 'kills' him, however, he is no longer capable of releasing himself and lies as inert and helpless as Bhīma had lain once bound in a serpent's coils.

Parallel situations can be found outside the *Mahābhārata*—for example, curiously enough, in the *Jātakas*. There is a story in the *Devadharma-Jātaka* which appears to blend the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the

*Mahābhārata*, though it is not certain which came earlier or whether both derive from the same folk source. Such certainty is not necessary here since our interest at present is only in comparison and contrast, for which the context provides ample scope. The Jātaka story must be recapitulated to facilitate discussion.

In that birth Bodhisattva was born—and given a name with an unpleasing sound, Mahimsaskumāra—as the eldest son of Brahma-datta, king of Vārānasi. His second brother Candrakumāra was from the same mother, the third Sūryakumāra was a step-brother. On the strength of a previous commitment, the step-mother insisted that her son must inherit the throne. The king was old but not as infatuated as Daśaratha. He called his first two sons aside and advised them to go away to the forest until he died, whereupon they could return and claim their right to the kingdom. The two elder princes were about to leave when the youngest brother came to know of their plans and decided, like Lakṣmaṇa to go along. So far the story resembles that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but in what follows we see the appearance of another kind of Yudhiṣṭhira familiar yet strange. Here too there is a lake, guarded by the rākṣasa Udaka, friend of Kuvera: here too there is an attempt to fetch water and a compulsion to answer questions, followed by seeming death and subsequent revival. The over-all scheme is identical, but a scrutiny of the details shows that just as Rāma cannot easily be compared to Yudhiṣṭhira, so does Yudhiṣṭhira bear no resemblance to Bodhisattva.

We note rightaway that Bodhisattva is endowed with royal and other *rajas*-born qualities, possessed of far greater initiative than Yudhiṣṭhira, and habituated to assuming authority. When he did not see either of his brothers on the spot, he uttered no word of lamentation. From observing their footprints he readily deduced that they had been captured by a lake-dwelling rākṣasa. Immediately he loosened his bow and unsheathed his sword to give battle, refusing to enter the water despite the persuasion of a forest-dweller who was really another rākṣasa in disguise. In a similar situation Yudhiṣṭhira picks up no weapon nor does any desire to counter-attack stir in his mind: he is filled with grief and lapses in judgment. Without seeking to discover the cause of the death of his brothers, he steps into the unknown hazard of the lake water.

Both of them, when told they could get back one brother only, ask for the life of the step-brother. This may seem natural in the

background of joint-family upbringing, but their requests spring from very different impulses. For Bodhisattva, the reason was clearly his regard for public opinion—lest somebody should suspect him of having done away with a step-brother. Yudhiṣṭhira, on the other hand, without any thought for his own welfare, wanted that his foster-mother should also have a son alive just as his own mother would. When Bodhisattva got back both brothers, he expressed no gratitude; instead, he rebuked the *rākṣasa* for wrong-doing, and by threatening him with punishments like a sojourn in hell, brought about a change of heart in the demon. Yet we know very well that the only demoniac action on the part of Udaka was to grab the brothers when they were in the water and, as chastisement for their giving wrong answers, removing them forcibly to his underwater realm—perhaps to lay in stock for a future meal.<sup>4</sup> But as soon as Bodhisattva appears, even before he has answered any questions, the *rākṣasa* changes into a harmless soul, seats him on a royal couch, washes his feet like a servant, then listens patiently to an exposition of *deva-dharma*, and finally gives up his *rākṣasa-dharma* without being urged a second time. All this underlines Bodhisattva's greatness; the *rākṣasa* accepts his superiority almost unwittingly; and Bodhisattva is quite aware of his own greatness. We note this from the beginning in his conduct and speech. This consciousness of his own greatness appears to be his leading quality. It is also a royal quality, but not only royal.

Let us consider the brahman boy Aṣṭāvakra again at this point. At the court of Janaka, his every utterance betrays the youngster as proud and impatient—as if he is certain of his victory even before he has met Bandī. Yudhiṣṭhira too—though sometimes praised and often condemned for being too mild and shy—does not behave in character when he first meets the python: 'Serpent, whoever you may be, tell me why you have caught and bound Bhīma? Yudhiṣṭhira asks you—answer him truly. What do you wish to know or want to eat, in exchange of which you will release Bhīma?' This is a perfectly just request, and we can sense Yudhiṣṭhira's anxiety about Bhīma. But the phrase 'Yudhiṣṭhira asks you' reveals that Yudhiṣṭhira is not entirely devoid of self-esteem. And when the python offers 'I shall release your brother if you can answer my questions', Yudhiṣṭhira wants to know the credentials of the questioner: 'I shall not answer your questions unless you assure me that you are educated in

the Vedas of the brāhmanas'. At that instant we discern a spark of arrogance in Yudhiṣṭhira's eyes—as if it were Aṣṭāvakra and not Yudhiṣṭhira who spoke.

In the chapter under discussion, the Yudhiṣṭhira with whom we are familiar, whom we had seen immediately after the dice-game ready to leave for the forest—that personage appears to us briefly in the fading light of late afternoon at the edge of a lake, but he is affected by or possessed of some strange knowledge. Here he does not complain about the killer of his brothers ; he neither protests nor argues, and is aware of some undefinable godly presence. Either because of that awareness or because his own being has undergone much change, his attitude now is not that of a challenger but that of a volunteer. It is not Bodhisattva's attitude—that of preacher and reformer—but the attitude of a pupil and learner we can easily associate with Yudhiṣṭhira. Even his tone of voice is deferential as he responds to the yakṣa-crane's demand ; 'O yakṣa, self-praise is not proper for any decent person. I submit that I shall do my best to answer you. Please ask your questions.'

This is a nodal point in Yudhiṣṭhira's career. All that he has been absorbing for the previous twelve years will soon have to be put into application, not in the isolation of a forest but in the courts of kings, amid pressures of politics, during a fearful battle and in the devastated times to follow. Whether his application will be successful or not we shall see in due course.

#### NOTES

- 1 There is a perfect parallel between questions and answers in a particular sequence. In the original Sanskrit, even the language is the same (See *Vana*, 133, 28-29 and 313, 61-62).

—'Who does not close his eyes when asleep ? What does not move after being born ? What does not have any heart ? What is it that grows by impetus ?'

—'A fish does not close his eyes while sleeping. An egg does not move after it has been delivered. A stone has no heart. A river grows by impetus.'

It is not necessary here to debate which is the original and which the derivation, because this kind of borrowing or derivation is characteristic of all pre-classical Sanskrit composition. It is well known that many ślokas are common to the various Vedas and Upaniṣads, to the Upaniṣads and the Gītā, to the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The questions asked

by the python are also again asked by the crane, but in a different language and a more diffused manner.

- 2 The proximity in the text between the Sāvitrī episode and the exchange between the crane and Yudhiṣṭhira seems quite appropriate to me. But I have not been able to figure out why an account of Karna's begetting should be placed in between (*Vana*, 299-309). Yudhiṣṭhira does not, of course, hear this—it would have caused grave damage to the plot if he had. Vaiśampāyana narrates this directly to Janmejaya, and the story is essential to our understanding of Karna's life and the psychology of his unwed mother. But it is simply impossible to find any link with what has gone before, and we cannot help concluding that its appearance at this point is inappropriate.

Incidentally, information about Karna's origin is to be found scattered in many places in the *Mahābhārata*. The first occurrence is the single line of 'the brief genealogy of the kṣatriyas' (*Ādi*, 63) where it is stated, 'Karna was born to Kuntī from Sūrya while she was yet unmarried.' In the genealogy of the Pāṇḍavas (*Ādi*, 67), we are told a little more—from Karna's birth to his losing the ear-rings. A little later (*Ādi*, 111) we are given a fuller account. All these are told by Vaiśampāyana, but we also hear about the same events from other sources. The Udyogaparva contains three references (138, 142, 143)—one, where Kṛṣṇa speaks to Karna; then in Kuntī's soliloquy; thirdly, in her dialogue with her first-born. At that point her statements are rational and dispassionate, but in the Strīparva, when the funeral rites for warriors slain in battle are being organized (27), she cannot keep her secret any longer and speaks of it openly in her laments. Finally, she relates the whole story once more later to Vyāsa (*Āśrama*, 30).

- 3 [The author has cited a Bengali source here—Volume 1, pp. 22-26 of the Bengali translation of the Jātakas by Ishanchandra Ghosh.]
- 4 Because Kuvera had directed the rākṣasa that if any person ignorant of *devadharma* were to enter that water, the rākṣasa was entitled to eat him up.

## EIGHT: MANY CHORIC VOICES

The rākṣasa Udaka asked only the question—'What is *devadharma*?'—and Bodhisattva gave him a fairly simple answer: 'He may be said to follow *devadharma* who is always calm and upholds the truth, who sings the praise of dharma with a pure mind, and who never

fails to be ashamed if he has any impure thought.’\* A simple creature like the *rākṣasa* was satisfied with that answer. The Dharma-crane would have parried with further questions like ‘What is truth? What thoughts are impure? How does one acquire calm?’ The number of his questions would not have reached one hundred and twenty-six if he had demanded from his son only an abstract maxim of dharma and not a comprehensive and practicable philosophy of life.

It will be noted that the questions relate to various branches of knowledge. Ethics and religion predominate, but biology and physics are also touched upon. Not every item of discussion is at a high intellectual level. There is some conventional eulogy of the Vedas and of the brahman, and some familiar expression of respect towards the gods and parents. But Yudhiṣṭhira has never given the impression of being an adherent of the *śāstras* nor does he seem committed to the Vedas. Otherwise he would not name prayer as ‘poison’ and in the same breath say that the Vedas are ‘always fruitful’<sup>1</sup>, and also call *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) the ‘principal’ truth. Does he not know that these statements contradict one another, that there is no place for *ahiṃsā* in the Vedic faith, based as it was on *yajña* ritual centred in animal sacrifices? Does he not know that Vedic sages were much given to praying for health, wealth, prosperity, happiness, victory? Some of his answers are utterly startling. When he designates evacuation of the mind’s filth as bathing, protection of animals as giving, wishing the happiness of others as kindness, then we seem to hear his own individual voice speaking at last transcending the *śāstras*. What he is saying here is related to his personal experience and rises from his own perceptions. Perhaps, just before leaving the forest, he had looked back just once more at the past—in which there was much ‘filth of the mind’ gathered between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas†—and also looked ahead at the future which contained a great battle. That is why he utters such unorthodox definitions of bathing, giving and kindness. Through all this shines his secret hope: let there be no war, let the body of the Kuru dynasty be cured of the disease of warfare.

[\*Translated from four lines quoted by the author from Ishanchandra Ghosh’s Bengali version of the *Jātaka*.]

[†The author has pointed out in an aside that Kaliprasanna replaced *manomaḥ* (filth of the mind) with *manomallnya* (difference of opinion).]

We can state the proposition from the opposite direction. The Dharma-crane cannot be satisfied with axiomatic expositions like 'In the use of arms lies the fulfilment of a kṣatriya, just as the fulfilment of a brāhmaṇa lies in the study of the Vedas.' He wants to draw out, with question after intricate question, the innermost thoughts of Yudhiṣṭhira. The deep-water fish that this crane is waiting for is no other than a confession of Yudhiṣṭhira's deepest perceptions. Dharma seems to be saying to himself with a smile, 'Let's forget what the textbooks say. Tell me what you personally believe.' With this in view, practically at the end of the examination, he asks those four profound questions: 'Who is happy? What is wonderful? Which is the way? What is the news?' Each of Yudhiṣṭhira's replies has, in bits and pieces, become common currency, but they are worth recalling here in their totality:

—'He is happy who, without being a creditor or being away from his normal place of residence, cooks a meal of vegetables in the fifth or sixth part of the day in his own home.'

Without being a creditor? Without being away from home? Just one meal of vegetables a day? Those of us who are ambitious and always striving for bigger things may squirm on hearing such answers. Such considerations may not be acceptable to us, or to the other Pāṇḍavas, but they are entirely valid for Yudhiṣṭhira. The whole of the following year he and his brothers will have to spend in hiding, as fearful refugees or displaced persons. He is deeply in debt to his brothers and to his wife because he has lost them their due and much-desired wealth and property. And as for the simple meal of cooked vegetables, it suits the man who will later ask for only five villages for five brothers in an attempt to resolve the dispute and avert war.

So far, Yudhiṣṭhira's replies may be regarded as topical. But the two which follow reach out much farther:

—'Every day creatures die, yet those who remain wish to live for ever—what can be more wonderful than this?'

—'Debate is inconclusive; *śruti* texts are numerous; there is no ṛṣi whose opinion can be regarded as final—hence the only way before us is the path already travelled by great men.'<sup>2</sup>

Our picture of Yudhiṣṭhira's mind becomes a little clearer now. He does not believe in the śāstras, nor does he have much faith in

any particular dogma. He wants to know the truth by exercising his own mind ; he wants to gain knowledge through his own responses. That we do not anticipate our own deaths even though we know that man is mortal, is not a new discovery. Hence what is surprising is that Yudhiṣṭhira should find this wonderful. To us this is most usual—we are so infatuated with life that we are not always conscious of being alive. But Yudhiṣṭhira seems to be standing at that distance from where he can see a much larger aspect of life, wherein death is present and accepted, and the preparation for death goes on simultaneously with the longing to live.

Philosophies contradict each other, and no sage is the sole owner of truth—but where do we go from such conclusions ? We cannot but stop and ask ourselves : since there have been numerous great men who have trod various paths, whose direction should we follow ? And if the word *mahājana* [in the original Sanskrit verse] is taken to mean 'all men', the confusion gets worse.<sup>4</sup> All men ? A corporate group of men ? But they surely do not choose a particular path. They are driven in a particular direction by chance or by their natural instinct. They are born, they give birth, they accomplish some necessary but commonplace work. Their most valuable contribution is that they help to perpetuate the species. It is difficult to believe, in spite of Nilkanṭha's directive to this effect, that the agreed path of the many is what was lauded by Yudhiṣṭhira or intended by Dharma. Yudhiṣṭhira has from the beginning revealed himself as exceptional because he is unlike any kṣatriya or king in conduct. Combining his virtues with his shortcomings, he remains an extraordinary person. On the other hand, the crane has not up to that point been content with simple replies. To reply that the common man's way is the only way is almost to negate the question itself. As for any alternative interpretation, there can be no authoritative indication that *mahājana* should mean 'great man'. The religious culture of India has never permitted any one dogma to be regarded as the one and only truth. Then what was Yudhiṣṭhira thinking of at this point ? What did he really want to say ?

We shall not find the answer to our questions in the text of the *Mahābhārata*, but Yudhiṣṭhira's subsequent career seems to offer some replies. Although he was constantly seeking directions and



receiving them, although he met many sages and paid them due respect and attention, he never accepted any of them as a guru or regarded any as one who had perceived the truth unerringly. And he was certainly not among those who trod the paths along which most people travelled. We have always seen him different from the others by reason of something like a mannerism or flaw of character. The character tendencies of Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Bhīma, Arjuna, Duryodhana and others are clear from the beginning. The same is true of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Rāvaṇa. They can all be tucked into pigeon-holes marked avarice, pride, courage, vengefulness, and truthfulness. But Yudhiṣṭhira has had to find and make his own way, proceeding slowly and uncertainly through much doubt and delusion, towards the still centre of realization. We are given a glimpse of this realization when, to the question 'What is the news' he answers :

—'That in the sun's fire, fed by the fuel of days and nights,  
Time cooks all living creatures in a grand illusion-provoking  
cauldron, stirring with the ladle of months and seasons  
—this is the only news.'

Instantly, like a vast earthly panorama lit by a flash of lightning we see the completed circle of life and death—the full picture of generation and birth, the comprehensive image of all life revolving in the wheel of growth and decay. We view this through the eyes of a 'seer' and tremble in fear as well as joy. What examiner would not but be pleased when he received such a reply to a difficult question ?

#### NOTES

- 1 The original has '*trayīdharmāḥ sadūphalāḥ*'. The *trayī* refers to the *Rg-*, *Yajur-*, and *Sāma-veda*.
- 2 [The author's translation of this verse follows the Bangavasi and Aryasastra editions. Siddhantavagis and Rajsekhar Basu give variant readings.]
- 3 [Here too Siddhantavagis and Rajsekhar Basu give variant readings. The question-answer sequence is not the same in each edition. The author has followed the Kaliprasanna Sinha version.]
- 4 [In this note, the author acknowledges a letter written to the editor of *Desh* about the meaning of '*mahājana*' and discusses this in some detail, concluding that Yudhiṣṭhira cannot really indicate what his 'path' will be because he does not yet know it himself.]

THE SWAN AND THE DOVE

A Note on Two Poems of Yeats

A sudden blow : the great wings beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push  
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs ?  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies ?

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower  
And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,  
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop ?

I have quoted the whole sonnet, partly because I think it one of the most powerful in the English language, partly because it is compact of meaning—the central meaning of the section in *A Vision* called “Dove or Swan”. It ends with an unanswered question, but the answer hardly matters. For the deed was done, and Zeus the Swan, “the brute blood of the air”, must have known but hardly cared that he was inaugurating two thousand years of Hellenic civilization.

From that copulation Leda laid two eggs. Out of one came Helen and Clytemnestra, beauty and murder, the Trojan war and

the themes of Greek tragedy. Out of the other came the warrior twins, Castor and Pollux. Some, according to Yeats, say that there were three eggs and that the third still lies unhatched in a forgotten temple awaiting its hour. But that will not be till two thousand years of Christian civilization have supervened on the Hellenic—so the time is almost come.

Yeats said later of “Leda” that he set out to write of his concept of history, but while he thought the image of bird and woman took up the whole foreground of his imagination till the octet forced itself into words. Sometimes his poems began from a picture, and perhaps Michael Angelo’s *Leda*, which used to hang near the entrance of the National Gallery, was the starting point of this one. Zeus impregnated Leda for the sake of his moment of passion, not for any one’s redemption or in coldblooded calculation, of the future of mankind; but he gloried in his offspring when he saw in them the heroic images that was part of himself, that would stand through suffering and death by the consequences of its moments of reckless passion. Troy fell, to be a song for all ages, for the delight of Gods and men.

According to Yeats, civilizations do not simply grow and die. Each has its characteristic scale of values and neglects or despises what will not fit into it. But there will always be scattered individuals who either cannot or even deliberately will not fit in and are in consequence neglected and downtrodden. Perhaps these grow in numbers, perhaps their experience teaches them to evolve into a different scale of values, in which the glorified qualities of the prevailing culture take a low place compared to the humbler powers that have enabled themselves to survive. But it is not till some outside power breaks in upon them, some alien culture that despises what their own rulers exalt and exalts what they despise, that they find their moment of self-assertion. The mighty are put down from their seat and the humble and meek are exalted.

Something like this happened when Christianity broke into the Hellenic world. Again, to show how Yeats saw it, I will quote in full one of his poems, later and quieter in tone, called “The Mother of God” :

The threefold terror of love ; a fallen flare  
Through the hollow of an ear ;

Wings beating about the room ;  
 The terror of all terrors that I bore  
 The Heavens in my womb.

Had I not found content among the shows  
 Every common woman knows,  
 Chimney corner, garden walk,  
 Or rocky cistern where we tread the clothes  
 And gather all the talk ?

What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,  
 This fallen star my milk sustains,  
 This love that makes my heart's blood stop  
 Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones  
 And bids my hair stand up ?

Somewhere, says Yeats, there is a tradition that the Holy Spirit—entered the Virgin Mary through her ear (at the Annunciation) to get her with child—there is no doubt that she put on his knowledge, or some of it, with his power ; and that what she knew she dreaded. Yet love for her son had to overcome the dread.

In the poem we do not see her as the triumphant singer of the Magnificat, but as a humble woman ready to take pleasure in the pleasures of humble life. The great quality of the heroic world was pride—pride justified by great achievement. In Christianity Pride is the first and chief of the deadly sins ; the great quality is in Humility. The ploy of passion, the worship of beauty, the ecstasy of being alive in the body on the earth, have become the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Prudence, or Providence, the thought of what will follow from an action, has become a high virtue. So the values are reversed. I find it difficult to imagine one of the old gods copulating with a mortal woman for any reason but momentary possession by her beauty—certainly not in calculation of some good to follow for the human race. But this is what made the Holy Spirit give a son to the Virgin Mary.

After Christian civilization what is to come next ? Yeats has many speculations but all he can say for certain is that its values will be in some way the reverse of all that orthodox Christians

have been taught to accept. And again there will be the dissident minority who cannot or will not accept the new scale of values, downtrodden but growing quietly in the dark till their moment comes. For "where there is nothing, there is God"; and out of the fabulous formless darkness some new unpredictable image will arise for the glory of some and the devastation of others.

When the Roman Empire began crumbling, partly through external assault and partly through the weight of its own bureaucracy, it seems possible to me that it was the churches scattered through centres large and small which, because they reflected the poor man's values, and on the whole had his confidence, were able to maintain some kind of stable social life. What more truth there may be in Yeats's cyclic, or perhaps it should properly be called spiral view of history I cannot venture to guess. It is for the reader, if he is interested enough, to read and reason and speculate till he has found the point where forecast gives way before the totally inapprehensible.

## **'ACTUALIZATION' AND 'CONCRETIZATION' AS HEURISTIC DEVICES IN THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LITERARY ART**

### **I. CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH A WORK OF LITERARY ART CAN BE REFLECTED UPON**

Literary criticism, i.e. the conscious reflection on the work of literary art, in various degrees and forms, has continuously been affected both by the psychological make-up of those who pursue it and by the ideological complexities of the time in which it is undertaken. Attempts to neutralize or at least minimize these affects, so that the object of one's reflection could be grasped *sine ira et studio*, have a long historical span.<sup>1</sup>

Today the question concerning the neutralization of such affects is as relevant as it has been in the past. Opinions as to whether such neutralization is indeed possible range from explicit denial to explicit affirmation. Edmund Husserl's theory of *epoché* is perhaps the most rigorous attempt of our time to make the intellectual inquiry free from the psychological presuppositional interferences into our reflective cognition.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, some of the structuralists, notably Lacan, Derrida, and particularly Foucault postulate the impossibility of the cognitive transcendence of one's own structure and hence of comprehending the *interpretandum* on its own terms. Foucault observed: "Interpretation will henceforth always be an interpretation by the 'who'. One does not interpret that which is in a signified but in the last analysis the one 'who' has laid down the interpretation. The principle of interpretation is nothing but the interpreter himself."<sup>3</sup> To Derrida, the thing 'out there' cannot be reached and interpreted as it is. In attempting to do this we always end up with creating an

illusory depth beyond our words, in sedimenting of our language upon someone else's.

The question whether we are or are not capable of comprehending something that is distinct from our own constitution is one of the most complex queries in the history of philosophical thought. All that can be said here is that at least in the realm of practical knowledge, intersubjectively valid judgments as representations that are intentionally related to the objects of our consciousness, are possible. Without such judgments, discernment between knowing and the known, between signant and signatum, would indeed become completely blurred. Therefore, the fundamental phenomenological claim that our consciousness can *cogitate* the *cogitatum* has to be posited at least as a matter of intellectual expediency.

In this article an attempt will be made to show how two theoretical concepts, or two heuristic devices, actualization and concretization, as they were conceived by a leading phenomenological theorist of literary art, Roman Ingarden, can facilitate our knowledge of the object of literary art, which is situated 'out there', but which exists as a phenomenon of our consciousness.

Phenomenological analysis, as James E. Edie aptly observed, "requires a consciousness which can achieve a complete awareness of its own acts and their objects within consciousness"<sup>4</sup>, or one may say, requires an awareness of awareness. Unlike other methodologies that hope to locate and seize 'these objects' outside consciousness, an aim that is either incredibly daring or absurd, phenomenological method attempts to 'seize' them only as they are given in consciousness. The 'seizure' of 'this or that'<sup>5</sup> is predicated upon and constituted by the functioning intentionality of our consciousness. Without this intentionality, it would not be able to contain what already exists within its horizon as well as to create new possibilities for what will or might be.

The object of literary art, both in its phenomenological givenness and in its aesthetic potentiality, can be perceived and reflected upon provided (a) our consciousness neutralizes within itself everything that might impede it from engaging freely in such acts and (b) this object is also freed from all those contingencies that might prevent it from manifesting itself as 'this or that'. Specifically, as a linguistic construct, this object is to be freed from that extra-literary context that seeks to ascribe to it specific functions, values, qualities, and the

like. It is to be disconnected from all this so that it can be constituted in our consciousness immediately rather than mediately. Further, it is to be discerned from its aesthetic potentiality, both as already attested at a specific time of its existence and as a pure readiness (*Parathaltung*) to take variant or even different semantic and poetic significations. In short, the object of literary art or the artistic *datum* is to be isolated as a schema, as "a completely static construct (*ein ganz starres Gebilde*) which in this stasis secures its identity"<sup>6</sup>. It is only upon this operation that we can ascertain this schema as an optimally organized lexical construct endowed with readiness to transcend itself aesthetically.

As a *datum*, the literary work of art is identical with itself, but as an aesthetic potentiality, it is transcendent to itself. The relationship between artistic *datum* (A) and its aesthetic potentiality (B) could then be expressed as  $A = B$ ,  $A \div B$ ,  $A > B$ ,  $A \leq B$ ,  $A/B$ . Yet, it can never be  $A \equiv B$  since such relationship would negate the readiness of A to become also B. In the  $A \equiv B$  equation, the artistic *datum* would cease to be aesthetically productive, would become tautological with its aesthetic *addendum*. In historic time the readiness of the work of literary art manifests itself intermittently. Thus, at a certain moment of its existence, it may or may not demonstrate this attribute. Hence the histories of artistic *datum* and its aesthetic *addenda* are not always coextensive.<sup>7</sup>

## II. ARTISTIC DATUM AND AESTHETIC ADDENDUM OR TRANSFORMATION AND THEIR CRITICAL RENDITION

In view of the above it is expedient to distinguish between an inquiry into the artistic *datum* from an inquiry into aesthetic concretization or aesthetic *addendum*. To seize the former, first we are to bracket the work's historical context as well as our own aesthetic expectancies, i.e. we are to render it both ahistorical and apsychological and only then reflect upon it and describe it. Description of it, by necessity, must be transformational. However, even though non-proportional to the *datum*, it must be interchangeable with it. Like all descriptions of this kind, it is not to be disturbed by *petitio principii*.<sup>8</sup> Except the prejudgment that the artistic *datum* is *telic* rather than *ecbatic*, i.e. that it is a classified rather than a quantified construct, all other assumptions about it are to be placed into inaction.



Sharing Roman Ingarden's position on the structure of the artistic object, I shall say that it can be described in terms of its four organizational strata (language sound patterns, unified meanings, presented objectifications, schematized aspects).<sup>10</sup> Description of these four strata could be undertaken on two levels : (a) on the level of material or coded discourse, and (b) on the level of the model. Both can be rendered by different semiotic systems. However, non-verbal and particularly algorithmic and mathematical renditions of the model, *per se*, are likely to lose recognizable affinity with the work of art.<sup>10</sup> The material or coded discourse, serially, either as metonymic chains or metaphoric equivalences, and which contain numerous places of indeterminacies,<sup>11</sup> are to be described both selectively and in their partial representation. Completed percepts of partially given objects that might emerge during our reading of the text are to be treated as aesthetic *addenda* ; i.e. creative additions of our mind, since, as Ernst Cassirer aptly observed, our mind in every moment of its intentional acts, tends to convert structural incompletions "into comprehensive totalities, into distinct groups and series."<sup>12</sup>

Aesthetic *addenda*, unlike artistic *data*, originate out of the specific encounter of our consciousness with the partially determined objects of the artistic work.<sup>13</sup> The nature and the magnitude of these *addenda* depend both upon the degree of the schematizations of all four strata of the artistic work as well as upon the creative capacity of the perceiving consciousness. Should, for example, the work's stratum of 'unified meanings' be dense, then, the valent aesthetic *addenda* will tend to approximate it rather closely. On the other hand, should it be minimal, they will tend to differ from it. However, no work of art, irrespective of its minimally or optimally given strata, can exempt itself from aesthetic *addenda* since its actuality and potentiality are not coextensive. As Ingarden observed, that which is in actuality might be perceived from "principally different positions, e.g. from the naive position of a simple consumer of literature, from the specifically aesthetic position, from the position pursuing political or religious interests ... and finally from the research position, adhered to by the literary scholar. In each of these cases there will be different modes of completion of interminant places, ... But of all these we apprehend only one, i.e. an aesthetic position since only this type corresponds to the aim of artistic literature."<sup>14</sup>

Aesthetic *addenda* do not yield as easily to description and

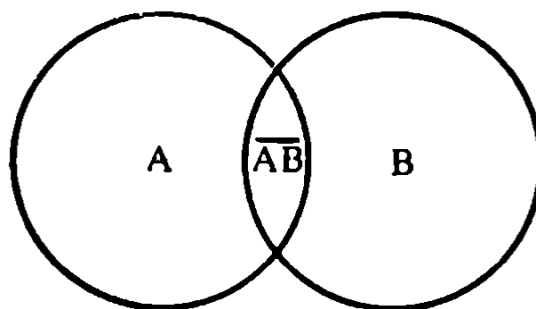
analysis as do artistic *data*. Here the mere selection presents a formidable problem. Description must be limited only to these *addenda* which have already been expressed by generally acceptable communicative systems, for example, the theatrical or cinemagraphic presentation of the dramatic text, the visual illustration of the novel's plot or protagonists ; the critical amplifications of specific components of the poem ; the creation of the poetic work as a response to a poetic work, etc. These are but very few examples that can be considered as aesthetic *addenda* to artistic *datum*. One should remember, however, that they always represent particular historicity rather than atemporal qualities of the work of art. In part, studies of these *addenda* might enable us to see to what extent the artistic object under scrutiny has been preserved, to what extent particular concretizations reveal or conceal its aesthetic potentialities, how our own concretizations differ from those we study, and to what extent they are subjective or inter-subjective.

### III. THE EXTENT OF COMPARATIVE INQUIRY

Actualization of what is given and reconstruction of what has been added to the work of literary art, as methodological or heuristic devices for the study of intentional objects, can also be applied to the comparative study of two or several literary works. Phenomenologically oriented scholarship has not yet explored fully this possibility. What follows here by no means intends to be programmatic. Much would have to be done theoretically before a definite method could be offered. As a preliminary speculation this can be said : Upon arriving separately at the intersubjectively invariant description of all four compositional strata of two artistic objects, we are then in a position to compare only several of them, or only two of them. No comparative inquiry can describe affinities of all four strata of the two literary works since such affinities hardly exist unless, of course, one deals with explicit parody or close imitation. Consequently, such limited comparative study can describe, for example, affinities of protagonists, or quasi-statements, or language, or aspects, but hardly ever two works *in toto*.

Graphically one could represent such study as two inter-locking circles in which expressions A and B represent diversity and  $\overline{AB}$  proximity.

Two epistemic pre-judgments are to be observed in such study : (a) both structural and material or coded affinities between two or more works of literary art are to be asserted only after they have been 'seized' and reflected upon separately and (b) such affinities exist only between some components of the work of literary art.



As an example, let us take Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and Schiller's *Don Carlos*, two works that were studied comparatively on previous occasions.<sup>10</sup> But first, what is the initial impetus for undertaking such a study ? First and foremost, in both works there are grand inquisitors who resemble each other a great deal. In *Don Carlos* : "Enter the Cardinal Grand Inquisitor, ninety years of age and blind, leaning on a staff, and led by two Dominicans. As he proceeds through their ranks, the grandees all cast themselves down before him ... He accords his blessings." In *The Brothers Karamazov* : "He is an old man, almost ninety, tall and erect, with a withered face and sunken eyes ... The crowd instantly bows down to the earth, like one man, before the old inquisitor. He blesses the people in silence and passes on." Both inquisitors, guardians of the ultimate order, are highly enigmatic and apodictic in their pronouncements. Both act from the position of ultimate power. Between the two works of literary art, this is, then, the point of contiguity. Moreover, *The Brothers Karamazov* contains 32 references to Schiller. Using this as a point of departure, let us see whether the two works, as artistic data, are related and in what way.

First, let us look at their material or coded aspects. *Don Carlos* is written in the iambic pentameter, blank verse, with numerous enjambments. Its vocabulary and syntax are highly rhetorical, exalted and often impassioned. It is a typical *Bühnensprache* of the *Sturm und Drang* type, at least to line 2940. Its semantic function visibly attempts to retrieve a pseudo-historical drama of the French prose romance of 1672 (*Don Carlos*, Nouvelle Historique, by Abbé César,

vichard de Saint-Réal). Its language, therefore, is not explicitly polysemous. Its protagonists, being *dramatis personae*, externally, are given *at once*, while internally, they are presented serially. Basically, the drama is constructed within the love triangle, father, stepmother, son, and treats all other themes, such as friendship, adultery, emotional agony, pride and even death, as derivative of this triangle. Briefly, its aim is an artistic rendition of the tragic love with all its psychological and historical complexities thereof.

*The Brothers Karamazov*, on the other hand, is a romantic novel, written in prose, arranged into four parts, twelve 'books' and the epilogue. Its vocabulary and syntax ranges from simple colloquial to a highly orchestrated philosophical discourse. It is Dostoevsky's most mature linguistic construct. Its semantic function is explicitly polysemous. Its protagonists, both externally and internally, are given serially. The novel, against the background of its convoluted love of father and son of Grushenka, explores the theological and moral complexities of God and Church, of man's existential choices and their tragic consequences. Here numerous themes exist as autonomous rather than hierarchically arranged phenomena. They seem to be coextensive with one another. Briefly, the novel aims at thematic multi-functionality.

Even within this highly schematic perception of the two literary works, the following observations seem to be plausible: on the level of their material aspects, they are explicitly disparate, but in terms of human relations, depicted in both works, there are some affinities. The King of *Don Carlos*, Philip II, and Fëdor Karamazov both share in similar disposition toward their sons, Don Carlos and Dimitri, respectively. Both are consummated by the crippling jealousy, both are adulterous, and both are hopelessly competing with their sons for the love of the considerably younger women. In *Don Carlos* the Cardinal Grand Inquisitor is juxtaposed with the submissive King while in the *Brothers*, with the commanding figure of Christ.

Thus, in the former, the awe-inspiring power of the Cardinal is left unchallenged while in the latter it is translated into the apocalyptic opposition of good and evil. In other words, in Schiller's work it is a dramatic device, a denouement, while in Dostoevsky's, among other things, it is an intensely philosophical probing into the tragic dimensions of freedom and human will. In sum, the affinity between these two artistic *data* is partial. There is no reason, of course, why,

after establishing this affinity, we should not proceed to describe comparatively their differences and thus perceive the two in their total givenness.

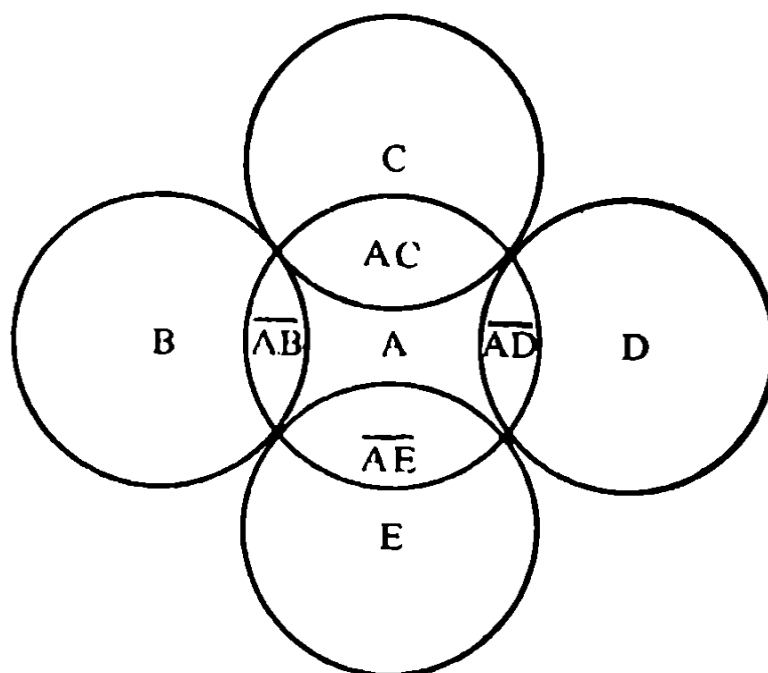
Aesthetic concretization of these two works of art, as a common denominator, cannot be studied simply because it does not exist as such. *Don Carlos* is aesthetically concretized *per se* and so is the *Brothers*. They do not *live* aesthetically as a unified configuration. However, what could be studied comparatively are the above common components as they are expressed aesthetically. For example, the aesthetic *addenda* to or the aesthetic transformation of the two Inquisitors, two fathers and sons, etc. Since such additions and transformations are always historical, the comparative study of them is to be confined to one and the same period. As it is known, the aesthetic perception of *Don Carlos*, since its artistic inception up to date, has undergone a series of shifts. It was perceived as a King Philip play, a Marquis of Posa play, a Don Carlos play, a family tragedy, etc. The *Brothers*, on the other hand, has not had yet as extensive a history as Schiller's drama, but it, too, has been variously experienced. The aesthetic 'lives' of the two might have something in common especially since father/son's erotic rivalries are considered as permanent literary topoi.

In this restricted way, Dostoevsky's celebrated novel could also be compared with other literary texts, e.g. Voltaire's *Candide*, Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Goethe's *Faust*, etc to which Dostoevsky refers both in the text and especially in his *Notebooks*.<sup>16</sup> Such multiple comparison could show the extent of the 'intertextual' character of Dostoevsky's novel. Diagrammatically, this intertextuality would produce a number of interlocking circles with common components,  $\overline{AB}$ ,  $\overline{AC}$ ,  $\overline{AD}$ ,  $\overline{AE}$ .

Actualization can be, of course, undertaken on the level of the modelling systems, i.e. on the level of the formal analogies. Inasmuch as the two systems are free of accidental features and thus are pure operational abstractions that exist prior to the coded discourse, they do not have to be subjected to the reductive process mentioned above.

The modelling system of Dostoevsky's novel can be compared with the modelling systems of the works of Schiller, Hugo, Goethe, etc. Comparison of Dostoevsky's and Schiller's works reveals pro-

found differences. Thus, while indeed some components of Schiller's and Dostoevsky's works display a striking similarity in terms of their modelling systems, the two works share little in common.<sup>17</sup>



The question whether aesthetic concretizations, *in sensu stricto*, can be studied at all is and will remain open. For example, a reader of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and for this matter any other work of literary art, consequently, experiences at least two types of aesthetic concretizations, one while reading the novel and another upon completing it. These two may resemble each other or may be at variance, since in the unfolding of the text, its objects might be perceived differently. For example, during the initial chapters, Ivan Karamazov might be concretized as a person with an integrated personality, while in the subsequent ones with a split personality. If one adds to this the fact that many aesthetic concretizations do not get verbalized and that those which do might be transformed by the prevalent linguistic code, then the question of the objective and comprehensive study of aesthetic concretizations, as such, might indeed appear very complicated. True, one can argue that what does not exist as a linguistic or any other semiotic fact, does not exist as a *datum* and therefore one need not speak of aesthetic concretizations which have not been expressed one way or the other.<sup>18</sup> And yet, as Jean Piaget observed, between the recognition of sign and conduct involving reconstitution and evocation, there are at least ten levels of transition

which could be empirically ascertained.<sup>19</sup> Hence, aesthetic concretization might not necessarily occur only as a verbal completion. Nevertheless, it must be expressed somehow in order to be studied objectively. Whether what is being expressed correlates exactly to what is intended to be expressed is a question that cannot be answered easily. This could be, however, said: Aesthetic concretizations, in order to be studied, are to be arrested or frozen in time by some system of verbal, cinematographic, choreographic, etc communicative signs. Only such concretizations may yield to a descriptive analysis. Most of the 'book-reviewing', 'l'explication de textes', 'découverte du poème', 'paraphrase', 'perspectival and depth interpretations', most of the academic and non-academic lecturing on this or that work of literary art, etc, are such 'frozen' concretizations. All of them attest to the multiple mode of the work's aesthetic existence.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, *The Brothers Karamazov* could be studied in terms of its continuous temporal changes as attested by the aesthetic *addenda* ascribed to it. Specifically, one could study the perception of this novel in the span of its historical life in one or in several countries; one could study comparatively the Russian, German, French and American perceptions of it; one could study its aesthetic concretization as part of the particular cultural syncretism or as part of the cult; and, finally, one could study it in conjunction with the aesthetic concretization of thematically or structurally similar works of literature.

Aesthetic concretizations, unlike reconstructive actualizations, occur on the material and never on the formal level. And since our consciousness is organized as a process of categorization, i.e. as differentiation and discrimination, works of creative arts are never concretized in their totality. In other words, in perceiving the work of literary art aesthetically, our consciousness amplifies, transforms and changes only some of its components and circumvents others. Due to this fact, even the most attentive contact with the work of art cannot be aesthetically comprehensive.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, in order to acquire an inclusive knowledge of the aesthetic sensibility of a particular period, the historian of literature must not limit himself only to one aesthetic perception, no matter how 'representative' or sophisticated it claims to be. He must study as wide a range of them as possible. Thus, to acquire a comprehensive view of aesthetic perception of *The Brothers Karamazov* in Russian in the

eighties, one must read a number of, often mutually exclusive, 'concretizations' of it, e.g. that of Solovëv, who considered Dostoevsky a "prophet of God" as well as Mikhailovsky's who thought of him as a "sadist". These and many other perceptions are simultaneous modes of this novel's 'life' in the eighties. Comparative study of aesthetic concretizations, for example, could mean multiple possibilities. To name only a few: comparison of such concretizations within the same period as well as within different periods; comparison of aesthetic concretizations by different generations, by different nations, by ideologically different groups; by committed as well as by objective criticism; by those with extra-literary and those with purely literary interests. Would such a study contribute, in any essential way, to our knowledge of aesthetic sensibilities of a given historical period? Should we agree with Pichois and Rousseau that the comparative study of literature "est l'art méthodique, par la recherche de liens d'analogie, de parenté et d'influence, de rapprocher la littérature des autres domaines de l'expression ou de la connaissance, ou bien les faits et les textes littéraires entre eux, distants ou non dans le temps ou dans l'espace, pourvu qu'ils appartiennent à plusieurs langues ou plusieurs cultures, fissent-elle partie d'une même tradition, afin de mieux les décrire, les comprendre et les goûter,"<sup>22</sup> then, such a study would in no way be devoid of intellectual significance.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The quest for a sound critical inquiry into the nature of the work of literary art is as old as this art itself. In our time, various schools of criticism, the phenomenological, the formalist, the structural/semiotic have greatly intensified this quest.

Reconstructive actualization of the work of literary art, as an artistic *datum* and concretization of its aesthetic potentialities, as a creative *addendum* to it or transformation of it, have been proposed as two viable devices for such an inquiry by phenomenological aesthetics and particularly by its most prominent representative Roman Ingarden.

In this brief exposition of these two devices, an attempt has been made to assess their applicability to the comparative approach to literary art. Adhering to Ingarden's ontology of intentional objects,



it has been stated that (1) problems of formal and material structures of the work of literary art in their immediate givenness cannot be explored objectively unless, by a process known as *epoché*, we free our consciousness from all those presuppositions which will impede such exploration. (2) After having bracketed both the particular presuppositions of our consciousness which tend to subordinate the object of our perception to themselves as well as the contextual contingencies of this object, we are to discern between artistic *datum* and aesthetic *addenda*. (3) The discernment of the former, via reconstructive *actualization*, it is to be strictly descriptive. The comparative study of two or more works of literary art, as artistic *data*, is not subject to historical delineation. Works produced in different historical and aesthetic periods can be brought into common focus. (4) The comparative study of aesthetic concretizations, on the other hand, is always historically bound. To be studied objectively, they must be rendered by some semiotically meaningful mode.

#### NOTES

1 Aristotle's views on *methodos* mark perhaps the initial thrust of what had subsequently become the perennial issue of practically every humanistic and scientific inquiry. In his celebrated *Psychology*, he wrote: "To arrive at any 'trustworthy connection' (*pistis*) about the soul is one of the hardest tasks with which we are ever confronted. As we are faced here with the same problem as in many other fields of investigation—the problem of discovering a thing's 'essential nature' (*ousia*) and 'what it really is' (*to esti*) it might be supposed that there is some single procedure (*methodos*) applicable to all the objects whose essential natures we may wish to ascertain, just as there is a single way of demonstrating each derivative property. If such were the case, it would be our task to discover the procedure in question. If, on the contrary, there is no universal procedure for finding a thing's 'real nature' (*ti esti*), we are faced with an even harder task; for we shall then have to determine with respect to each particular subject what method (*tropos*) is to be pursued. Moreover, even if it is obvious that the method is to be a certain kind of demonstration (*apodeixis*) or 'logical division' (*diairesis*) or something equally familiar, we are still beset with difficulties and liable to error when we look for the proper starting point of our inquiry." (Aristotle, tr. by Philip Wheelwright, New York, 1951, p. 117)

2 Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (The Hague, 1950/52), Vol. I, p. 6. Cf. also Roman Ingarden's discussion of *epoché* in "Probleme der husserlischen Reduktion", *Analocia Husserliana*, ed. by A.T. Tymieniecka, (Dordrecht, 1976), pp. 1-73. On the other hand,

Hans-Georg Gadamer, known for his views on hermeneutics, believes that the neutralization of one's prejudice is not only unnecessary, but also harmful. Such neutralization renders us sterile and incapable of effectively grasping the object. Hence "it is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudgments that constitute our being." (*Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen, 1960, p. 261) Merleau-Ponty believes that the containment of the thesis of the world, as it exists in our consciousness, is neither possible nor necessary since the subjects and objects achieve an accord prior to all reflection. What is necessary is that the subject prepares itself for the object, becomes on a par with it. Such preparation, through an intensive self-awareness, contains the perceiving consciousness to destroy the object (cf. *Phenomenology of Perception*, New York, 1922).

3 Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche", *Cahiers de Royaumont, Philosophie* (Paris, 1967), No. 6, p. 189.

4 James M. Edie, "Transcendental Phenomenology and Existentialism", *Phenomenology, The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and its Interpretation*, ed. by Joseph J. Kockelmans (New York, 1967), p. 243.

5 Cf. Joseph J. Kockelmans, *Phenomenology and Physical Science* (Pittsburgh, 1966), pp. 40-47.

6 Roman Ingarden, *Das literarische Kunstwerk*, 4th ed. (Tübingen, 1972), p. 389.

7 Roman Ingarden defines the work of literary art as intentional objects this way: "All their material determination, formal moments, and even their existential moments, which appear in their contents, are in some way only ascribed to purely intentional objects, but they are not embodied in them, in the strict meaning of this word ... In other words, a creative poetic act cannot create a self-existent object. It is 'impotently creative'. What it creates lives by its grace and its support, and cannot become something 'spontaneous, independent, autonomous'. If it may be so expressed, it cannot 'rebel' against the acts of consciousness that produced it, it cannot have any other properties in its contents, any other identity, arbitrarily chosen, *but those* which have been ascribed to it. It does not have its own existential foundation in itself. Its existential foundation is in the conscious act that produced it intentionally, or more exactly in the psychic subject who performed the act." (*Times and Modes of Being*, Springfield, III, 1964, p. 64.)

8 Cf. Roman Ingarden, "Über die Gefahr einer Petitio Principii in der Erkenntnistheorie", *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* (Halle, 1921), Bd. 4, pp. 545-68.

9 Cf. my "The Concept of Strata and Phases in Roman Ingarden's Theory of Literary Structure", *The Personality of the Critic*, ed. by J. P. Strelka (University Park, 1973), pp. 10-39.

10 Mikel Dufrenne speaks about such renditions of the structure in this way: "(1) The mathematical formula discovered in the construction of a work is often only approximated. (2) No formula can be evoked to explain the beauty of a work. A schema, whether numerical or not, instructs us concerning the structure of a work and reveals to us the procedure of its fabrication, but tells us nothing of the total work which can be considered only on the condition of relegating the results of our analysis to a second level. (3) We must not believe that this formula

is indispensable to artistic creation. We could discover an order in a picture which is rigorous and subject to mathematics without that order's having been deliberately willed by the artist. Inspiration can lead to the same results as calculation and an artist can incorporate geometrical shapes into his work while having no thought of geometry as such." (*The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Evanston, 1973, p. 294.) Roman Ingarden stated his views on the quantitative analysis of the work of art in "Sprawa stosowania metod statystycznych do badania dzieła sztuki", *Studia z estetyki* (Warsaw, 1970), Vol. III, pp. 56-94.

11 Cf. Roman Ingarden, *Das literarische Kunstwerk*, pp. 261-70, also Henryk Markiewicz, "Places of Interminacy in a Literary Work", *Roman Ingarden and Contemporary Polish Aesthetics*, ed. by P. Graff and S. Krzemien-Ojak (Warsaw, 1975), pp. 159-71.

12 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (New Haven, 1957), Vol. III. p. 115.

13 By specific encounter, I mean such an attitude through which the reader seeks no particular objective, e.g. knowledge, verification of his assumption, support for his ideology, etc. In this type of encounter he neither reconstructs nor adapts the artistic work to his expectations, he simply lets it unfold itself in its fullness. Hence the term concretization could have a variety of meanings. Actualization of the work's structure or the cognition of its sound system could also be regarded as concretization. In this article this term is applied only to the "aesthetic *addenda*" or aesthetic amplifications.

14 Roman Ingarden, *Issledovaniia po estetike* (Moscow, 1962), p. 85.

15 Cf. for example, D.I. Čyževskij, "Schiller und die Brüder Karamazov", *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie* (Leipzig, 1929), VI.

16 Cf. Edward Wasiolek, ed. and trans., *The Notebooks for The Brothers Karamazov* (Chicago and London, 1971).

17 Edward Wasiolek in his studies of Dostoevsky has shown that Dostoevsky knew what he was writing about. Dostoevsky's notes for *The Brothers Karamazov* "are not those of germination, quest and discovery ... The subject is firm, the identities of the chief characters are fixed, and the basic dramatic situation is clear ... The differences between notes and novels are differences between schematic representation and dramatic embodiment, summary and amplification, between ideas and the dramatization of the ideas." (*The Brothers Karamazov*, Chicago, 1971, p. 12).

18 Some psychologists maintain that reality cannot be grasped independently of language once language has been acquired (cf. J. Church, *Language and the Discovery of Reality*, N.Y., 1961). Psychoanalytic theories of consciousness are also predicated upon the notion that consciousness is identical with the ability to verbalize (cf. Dollard, J., Miller, N., *Personality and Psychotherapy*, N.Y., 1950).

19 Jean Piaget, *Main Trends in Psychology* (N.Y., 1970), p. 13.

20 This, of course, implies that ontologically artistic objects are ahistorical or synchronic while aesthetic concretizations are historical or diachronic. Roman Ingarden was rather explicit on this point. He wrote: "For us the point of greatest importance is the fact that concretizations which occur in particular

epochs are primarily exponents of a relation between the work and the literary atmosphere of this epoch rather than between the work and an individual of a reader. In its concretizations the work becomes typical of its epoch. Since the work lasts through various literary epochs and is perceived through its concretizations, it seemingly undergoes characteristic changes and, considered from this vantage point, it becomes a particular *historical, temporal object*, whereas considered as a work in itself, most faithfully reconstructed, it is a *timeless object*." (*Studia z estetyki*, Warsaw-Lodz, 1966, Vol. I, p. 242.)

21 Ingarden described this process this way: "Of course, the ideal reading would be such in which the reader would face only those *strata which compositionally and artistically are most prominent* so that the work could express all its aesthetic qualities in concretization. But simultaneous exposure of the perceiver to all sides of the work can hardly take place especially when there is an *explicit* presence of the point of view, a definite orientation of the work in its concretization, and hence the 'narrowing', of the perspective in concretization. All this results on the one hand, due to the multi-stratal nature of the literary work, and on the other, due to the fact that the reader must fulfill *many* different cognitive, reproductive and creative functions and therefore is unable to fulfill them simultaneously and with equal attention, participation and an involved gratification of all aesthetic values appearing in the concretization in its different strata." (*Issledovanie po estetike*, Moscow, 1962, pp. 90-91)

22 *La Littérature comparée* (Paris, 1967) p. 174.

## DID BAUDELAIRE KNOW KEATS ?

Though Baudelaire names almost all the greater English poets, dramatists, and prose writers, he translated and praised only those whom the English-speaking world has little appreciated and has never ranked as high as he did. He spent much energy on translating Poe, De Quincey, the Rev. Croly, and Thomas Hood and was fascinated by the works of Byron. At a deeper level, his aesthetic affinities with the English Romantics cannot be denied ; but, though he mentions Shelley, Scott, Wordsworth, and Byron several times, he mentions Keats nowhere in his works and letters ; and even Coleridge to whom he owes his theory of imagination is named only once and that too in a footnote.

Such reticence on the part of the French poet has led to a considerable muddle about his relations with his English predecessors. The question of relationship becomes more confounded by his own denial in an unpublished letter of any influence of Poe on his poetry,<sup>1</sup> on the one hand, and by his overestimation of this same writer, on the other. Further, his Romantic aesthetics is almost entirely Keatsian and Coleridgean and owes little to Byron whom he over-rated while there is no direct evidence in his *Oeuvres complètes* to show that he knew Keats at all. The result is that while several studies exist which compare Baudelaire, Poe, De Quincey, and other English and European poets and writers, there is none that attempts to discuss his affinities with Keats. Nonetheless, there has been no dearth of *obiter dicta* by the Baudelaire critics on the similarities of the aesthetic principles of these two great poets and letter writers of the last century.

One of Baudelaire's English contemporaries, Swinburne who came under his influence along with the other *fin de siècle* writers, was the

first to note Baudelaire's affinities with Keats. He compared Baudelaire's poem "À une passante" with a poem of Keats's "Time's sea hath been five years at its slow ebb. ..." Swinburne was a great admirer of *Les Fleurs du mal* as his article in *Spectator* of September 1882 and his poem "Ave Atque Vale" show. But such resemblances between any two poets may appear at first sight to be not uncommon ; and, though the influence of Baudelaire on later nineteenth century English literature was combined with that of Keats, his affinities with Keats did not attract the attention they deserved.

After Swinburne, the most well-known remarks on Keats come from Louis Cazamian in his celebrated *History of English Literature*. Concluding on Keats, he observes :

Without pushing too far our inductions from the texts, we must see in them the seed of that psychological morbidness, of which the century, then in its opening period, was to witness the gradual development ; the pain of joy, and the joy of pain, are already sounded by Keats and passion itself becomes conscious of the cruelty which hides in some of its ardours. English Romanticism attains in Keats the final stage of its progress ; and this pessimism is deeper and more significant than that of Byron : it has not its secret source in any tragic mystery, and it is thus much more inevitable. It springs from the satiety of a soul which yet has made no demands upon the more common joys of life ; it is made up of the unconquerable feeling of the fragility of beautiful forms, as of the vanity of the effort through which desire seeks to transcend itself. In its bitter realism, its clear-sighted sadness, clothed in harmonies both sumptuous and full, the Ode on Melancholy has a fore-taste of the *Fleurs du Mal*.<sup>2</sup>

The achievement of Keats vis-à-vis his contemporaries, especially Byron, the modernity of his poetic sensibility, and its far-reaching influence were expressed here by a French critic with an admirable lucidity in 1924 when this history was first published in French. Cazamian, however, did not reiterate this suggestion in *A History of French Literature* published in English in 1955. Between these dates several passing references appeared regarding the resemblances of these two poets. They relate to actual borrowings from Keats's poems and conceptual similarities.

Thus, one important passing remark, no less forceful and suggestive, comes from one of Baudelaire's greatest English disciples

and admirers, T.S. Eliot. Reviewing Peter Quennell's book on *Baudelaire and the Symbolists* in *Criterion*, January 1930, Eliot wrote :

For it will not do to label Baudelaire ; he is not merely, or in my opinion even primarily, the artist ; and if I compared him with any one in his own century, it would be to Goethe and to Keats—that is to say, I should place him with men who are important first because they are human prototypes of new experience, and only second because they are poets.

These general remarks describe the essential Baudelaire and the essential Keats ; yet, in spite of such suggestions no comparative study of their poetry and thought was attempted.

It is a measure of the hesitant pace of this inviting comparison that, in spite of several significant mentions of Keats by Jean Massin in the main text of *Baudelaire entre Dieu et Satan* (1945) the most important observation is relegated to a footnote on page 207. Speaking of the contrast between the theoretical tendency in Baudelaire to “seeing a creation in poetry” (voir dans la poésie une création) and his “practical tendency to undertake its exploration” (sa tendance pratique à en faire une exploration), Massin says in this note that few poets have stated this problem of creation of Beauty out of Truth (and not *ex nihilo*) as clearly as Baudelaire except Keats :

... mais l'un d'eux, au moins, le présente de façon aussi typique que Baudelaire : c'est Keats. Qu'on se souvienne des déclarations de la fameuse lettre à Bailey : “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth—whether it existed before or not—for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty ... The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it Truth.” Mais qu'on n'oublie pas de mettre en regard la fin de l'Ode on a Grecian Urn. Il y a là un antagonisme latent dans l'âme de tout poète ...

(... but one of them, at least, puts it in as typical a way as Baudelaire does : it is Keats. Let us recall some statements from the famous letter to Bailey ... But let us not forget to consider the end of the Ode on a Grecian Urn. There is a latent antagonism in the soul of every poet.)

A second footnote appears on page 292 where Massin quotes the famous lines from *Fusées*. Baudelaire is defining his concept of

Beauty which is never dissociated from 'Malheur' (Sadness), and Massin compares it with Keats's utterance in *Hyperion* : "...how beautiful if sorrow had not made / Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self." The case for a study of the resemblances between Keats and Baudelaire has been made out here in greater detail, primarily in the aesthetic sphere.

To take another example, Henri Peyre in *Connaissance de Baudelaire* (1951) mentions Keats several times along with other English poets of the Romantic and other periods by explicitly referring to Baudelaire's aesthetics :

Several of Baudelaire's aesthetic data, perhaps quoted from Poe, recall the romantics of Great Britain : Coleridge, at times ; Blake even more, for whom every thing exists in human imagination ; or Keats, who wanted poetry to surprise by a fine excess and proclaimed beauty to be truth when it was perceived by human imagination.<sup>3</sup>

No detailed comparison of these two poets, this book confirms the suggestions made up to this date only by stray references. The potential of the theme remains undetermined ; yet the fact that references to Keats have begun to occupy more and more space in Baudelaire criticism is significant. And we make a definite though only a little advance towards a clearer formulation with L.J. Austin who, quoting from Cazamian and slightly elaborating the point, raises the basic question :

Il paraît invraisemblable que Baudelaire n'ait pas connu Keats : nous n'avons relevé pourtant aucune allusion au poète anglais dans les écrits de son émule français.<sup>4</sup>

(It appears improbable that Baudelaire did not know Keats : we have not so far discovered any allusion to the English poet in the writings of his French compeer.)

This was in 1956. Austin is extremely clear about the aesthetic affinities between Keats and Baudelaire, and has devoted much more space than any other critic to their comparison, but mentions only one parallel (other than the one noted by Swinburne) between their poetry : Baudelaire's "Paysage" as an echo of Keats's "Fancy". So far Austin alone has hit the nail on the head by pointing out that Baudelaire nowhere mentions Keats in any of his documents in prose or poetry.



This is really so ; there is no direct allusion whatsoever to Keats by Baudelaire. Yet "the notes to his edition of *Art romantique* (Conard, 1925, p. 546), Jacques Crépet says that the English words "*hysterical tears*" used by Baudelaire in his essay on "Marceline Desbordes-Valmore" are an "expression empruntée à Keats" (expression borrowed from Keats). In fact, Keats nowhere uses this phrase in his works. Since Crépet's edition, critics have either accepted Keats as Baudelaire's source (P.M. Wetherill in *Charles Baudelaire et la poésie d'Edgar Allan Poe*, Paris, 1962, p. 177 dubs it as "la seule allusion à Keats contenue dans toute son oeuvre"—the only allusion to Keats contained in his whole work) or have been unable to trace this phrase in Keats's works (Margaret Gilman in *Baudelaire the Critic*, 1971, p. 249 merely says that she has been "unable to find the phrase in Keats").

As the present writer has shown in a note, "Baudelaire a-t-il connu Keats ?" (*Bulletin Baudelairien*, Nashville, 9 April 1973, p. 27), this direct quotation by Baudelaire from Keats doesn't exist. Yet it is quite probable that Baudelaire knew Keats through the unauthorized Galignani edition of the poems of *Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats* published in Paris in 1829, or through the eleven American editions of the same published between 1831 and 1853. We have moved away from the realm of mere conjecture to one of strong probability where we have to rely solely upon internal evidence of their aesthetic affinities, or direct but unacknowledged borrowings of a few expressions by Baudelaire from Keats's poems.

One such recent attempt is a note in French by Jean François Delesalle on "Baudelaire et Keats" published in *Etudes baudelairiennes*, II (Neuchâtel : A la Baconnière, 1971, pp. 189-95). The author compares the last part of the "Ode to Psyche" with "A une Madone", the "Hymn to Pan" in Book I of *Endymion* with "Les Litanies de Satan" and a verse from the "Ode on Melancholy" (Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose) with a line from "A Celle qui est trop gaie" (Que j'ai puni sur une fleur). These parallels are in addition to the two already listed by Crépet and Blin in their edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*, 1942. Delesalle believes that these parallels are striking enough ("la similitude paraît assez frappante") to make us accept Keats as Baudelaire's source ; while the editorial note appended to my note referred to above, affirms that the interesting parallels studied by M. Delesalle "prouvent que

Baudelaire a lu Keats" (prove that Baudelaire read Keats). Such finality, at any rate, appears extravagant ; all that this evidence proves is that there is a pretty strong case for comparison if the entire evidence is taken together.

The general *obiter dicta* on Baudelaire's affinities with the English romantic tradition have, however, continued unabated, P.M. Jones in *The Background of Modern French Poetry* (London, 1968, p. 57) observes :

It seems probable that Baudelaire and his successors apprehended the ethereal qualities of English Romanticism through a few of the poems of Poe. Why, we might ask, did they not become equally excited about Coleridge, Shelley or Keats ? Part of the answer, no doubt, would be that none of these had written tales of mystery and imagination.

Nicholas Osmond in *French Literature and its Background* (ed. by J. Cruickshank, London, 1969, p. 35) says much the same thing : "Baudelaire is much closer than his immediate predecessors to Coleridge and the English Romantics." So also René Wellek in *Discriminations*, 1970 :

Baudelaire's aesthetic is mainly romantic, not in the sense of emotionalism, nature worship, and exaltation of the ego central in French romanticism, but rather in the English and German tradition of a glorification of creative imagination, a rhetoric of metamorphoses and universal analogy.

If Baudelaire is a romantic in the English tradition, his affinities with Keats are inescapable ; and the fact that Baudelaire came to know English romanticism for the most part only through lesser writers like Poe and Byron does not detract from his achievement in French. On the other hand, the French qualities of Keats's outlook and temperament are stressed by E.K. Brown in a review of Lucien Wolff's life of *Keats* (Paris, 1929) published in *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 39 (1931), p. 240 :

Critics have talked abundantly enough of the Greek quality in Keats ; but although what is Greek is never far from being French, it was left for Mrs. Wharton, I believe, to point out the deep temperamental affinity between Keats and a people he never visited. In that bubbling little book in which she attempts to render French ways and their

meaning intelligible and attractive to the American doughboy she falls back again and again upon Keats. The French are like Keats, she says, they look upon life and love and beauty and pleasure as he did, open your Keats and you will find France an open book. One has only to be told that this is so : surprise is followed by immediate and complete assent.

Now leaving aside Baudelaire's omission to name Keats and our failure to detect any essential relation between them, some eminent *baudelairiens* like Enid Starkie and Marcel Ruff have complained that really valuable studies on this French poet are only a few in number. There is hardly any exaggeration in this statement. "The only valid critical work on Baudelaire's poetry," says Henri Peyre, "on his aesthetic, on his self-revelation in letters and private journals, on his position in modern letters and on his immense influence has all been accomplished since 1920 or so."<sup>6</sup> The same situation obtains in the case of Keats. "The period since world war II . . . may be said to continue and to lend nuances to the insights (and the attempt to consolidate insights) of the 1920s and 1930s", says W.J. Bate.<sup>6</sup> Thus one of the "great areas of shadow" that "still remain in the Baudelairean field," says Marcel Ruff at the beginning of his study of Baudelaire,<sup>7</sup> may well be the French poet's relationship with Keats. There is yet another reason for a study of Baudelaire's status in the English-speaking world : he has received a very warm welcome from across the Channel and now the Atlantic. Henri Peyre has expressed surprise at the absence of a work on Baudelaire's influence abroad for he has been more warmly praised in England and the English-speaking countries than any other French poet. Considering Turquet-Milnes' study on this subject, *The Influence of Baudelaire in France and England*, as incomplete, unsystematic and out-of-date, he observes :

Une telle étude pourrait être précédée de considération sur les relations de Baudelaire avec la poésie anglaise ; car si le poète a trouvé auprès des britanniques un accueil plus promptement chaleureux qu'en son propre pays, c'est en partie parce qu'il leur apportait quelque chose qui différait moins de leur tradition poétique que ne l'avait fait Racine ou Hugo.<sup>8</sup>

(Such a study should be preceded by a consideration of Baudelaire's relations with English poetry ; because if Baudelaire has found from the

British a warm welcome more promptly than in his own country, It is partly because Baudelaire carries to them something that differs less from their poetic tradition than did Racine or Hugo.)

This puts Baudelaire in a new perspective ; and a study of aesthetic affinities between Keats and Baudelaire would seem worthwhile. Yet one question surely emerges : Isn't there something yet to be known or discovered to account for these aesthetic affinities ? The other, and perhaps equally pertinent, question would be whether both owed their affinities to one or more common sources : Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge, whom both name in their works.

A question related to this is that of Baudelaire's knowledge of English. Marius Bewley says that "... it is difficult not to doubt that if Baudelaire had known English better he would have liked Poe less."<sup>9</sup> It is more or less true that his knowledge of the English language was not scholarly enough as the number of mistakes noted in Crépet's edition of Baudelaire's translations of Poe indicate, nor was it bad enough to make us dub him as incompetent.

As one reads Keats and Baudelaire again and again, one is struck with the resemblances of their aesthetic ideas. Margaret Gilman notes, "It is plain that Baudelaire's taste in literature, as in art, was extraordinarily personal and original, independent of traditional judgments and classifications. There is nothing one would like more than to know in full what his reading was during these formative years ; what books his father had left, what discoveries he made in his school years, in and out of the classroom, what the successive volumes under his arm were, what those in the cupboard, on the book-cluttered divan of the Hotel Pimodan apartment."<sup>10</sup> Was Keats not one of these though he doesn't name him ? As regards Poe, the current critical consensus is, in the words of Robert Kanters, that "... il faut dire que ce n'est pas Baudelaire qui doit beaucoup à Poe, mais Poe que doit beaucoup à Baudelaire."<sup>11</sup> (It must be said that it is not Baudelaire who owes much to Poe but Poe who owes much to Baudelaire.) W.T. Bandy also observes :

D'une part, les critiques anglo-saxons ont tendance trop souvent à dédaigner Poe tout en admirant l'oeuvre de Baudelaire ... D'autre part, les critiques français (et, en général, la plupart des critiques européens) ont de Poe une vue qui est peut-être trop imprégnée de la ferveur baudelairienne.<sup>12</sup>

(On the one hand, the Anglo-Saxon critics are very often inclined to reject Poe altogether while admiring the work of Baudelaire. ... On the other, the French critics (and generally the majority of European critics) have an opinion of Poe which is perhaps too impregnated with a Baudelairian zeal.)

In his letter to Théophile Thoré, about 20 June 1864, from Brussels, Baudelaire wrote that he translated Poe because he resembled him; not only the themes imagined by him, but even sentences thought of by him were written twenty years before by Poe. He was excited at the discovery of Poe. One cannot help wondering what Baudelaire's feelings would have been had he discovered Keats!<sup>13</sup> Poe, however, remains intrinsically a second-rate poet like Byron, but his reputation and influence in the non-English-speaking countries are an interesting paradox of literary history. C.M. Bowra has a significant observation to make on both Poe and Byron. Both have been overestimated by the non-English-speaking peoples, but—

Byron is a considerable poet, who had much of interest to say. But can the same be claimed for Poe? Did he do anything that had not already been done better by Coleridge or Keats? Has he really added to creative experience, except in a small, not very important section of it? ... In essence, perhaps, he (Poe) was not very different from Shelley and Keats, who found their ideals of song in the skylark and the nightingale.<sup>14</sup>

This line of argument would throw some more light on the question of relations between Keats and Baudelaire, through Poe. Poe also names Keats nowhere in his works, though there is unmistakable internal evidence to prove that he knew Keats and borrowed typical Keatsian expressions like "owl-downy" in his poem "An Enigma" (the "downy owl" of the "Ode on Melancholy"), and that his poems "To Science", "El Dorado", and "Al Aaraaf" were influenced by Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "La belle dame sans merci", and *Endymion* respectively.

It would seem that the Poe-Baudelaire nexus is really overdone for their comparison is very unequal; Baudelaire resembles Keats much more than any other poet outside France, and a comparison with the author of the "Ode to a Nightingale" is honourable to both. Our appreciation of Baudelaire's intrinsic worth has far outstripped that of the author of "The Poetic Principle", and let it not be easily forgotten that Poe's poetry "derives from Shelley and Keats."<sup>15</sup>

Both Keats and Baudelaire are still in a process of discovery and perhaps the need of speculating over what Keats might have been had he lived longer (this question does not arise in the case of Baudelaire) will never cease. The usual answer given so far by a majority of critics that he would have become a great dramatist *à la Shakespeare* would appear reasonable, but we should rather agree with Graham Hough who indirectly lends support to the view on which this article is based :

Perhaps if he (Keats) had reached maturity the pre-Raphaelite movement would have been a less abortive affair than it was, would have reached something of the dimensions of French Symbolism. For myself, I find it easier to see him developing in this direction than towards the dramatic interpretation of life that he foresaw towards the end of his career ... It is to Keats, if any one, that we must look for a solution of the Romantic conflict, and his solution is incomplete.<sup>14</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 Unpublished letter of 1865 of Baudelaire's quoted by Claude Pichols in his essay on "Baudelaire ou la difficulté créatrice" in *Baudelaire-Etudes et Témoignages* (Neuchâtel, 1967), p. 246 : 'Baudelaire confesse : "J'ai perdu beaucoup de temps à traduire Edgar Poe, et le grand bénéfice que j'en ai retiré, c'est que quelques bonnes langues ont dit que j'avais emprunté à Poe mes poésies, lesquelles étaient faites dix ans avant que je connaisse les oeuvres de ce dernier." (I have wasted much time in translating Edgar Poe, and the great benefit I have drawn from it is that some good tongues have said that I have borrowed from Poe my poems, which were written ten years before I knew the works of Poe.)
- 2 Emile Légouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature*, rev. ed. (1965), pp. 1063-64.
- 3 See the chapter on "Baudelaire, Classic and Romantic", reproduced from *Connaissance de Baudelaire* in English translation in *Baudelaire*, Henri Peyre, ed. (New York, 1962), p. 24.
- 4 *L'Univers poétique de Baudelaire* (1956), p. 7.
- 5 *Op. cit.*, p. 2.
- 6 Ed., *Keats* (New York, 1964), p. 7.
- 7 *Baudelaire*, trans. Agnes Kertesz (1966), p. 1.
- 8 *Connaissance de Baudelaire* (1951), pp. 170-71. See also Saintsbury's *A Short History of French Literature* (1945), p. 532, where Saintsbury says the same thing : "... his (Baudelaire's) models both in literature and life were rather English than French." On the other hand, Sidney Colvin observes in a footnote, p. 175 of his *John Keats, His Life and Poetry, His Friends, Critics,*

and *After-Fame* (1918) that "Keats was more widely read in out-of-the-way French literature than could have been expected from his opportunities, and there are passages in *Endymion* which run closely parallel to Gombauld's romance (*Endymion*), notably the first apparition of Cynthia with the description of her hair (*Endymion*, ll. 605-18), and the account of the sudden distaste which afterwards seizes him for former pleasures and companions. But these may be mere coincidences . . ." We may add here that the title of Keats's famous ballad was borrowed from Alain Chartier.

- 9 "Some aspects of Modern American Poetry", in *Modern Poetry: Essays in Criticism*, ed. John Hollander (New York, 1968), p. 250.
- 10 *Baudelaire the Critic* (1971), pp. 16-17.
- 11 "Je considère le poète comme le meilleur des critiques", chapter VII in *Baudelaire* (Paris, 1961), pp. 199ff.
- 12 "Baudelaire et Poe", in the special death centenary issue on *Baudelaire* of *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* (April-June 1967), p. 108.
- 13 Baudelaire wrote to Sainte-Beuve, March 30, 1865 :

Without any transition, I will tell you that I have just found an admirable melancholy Ode by Shelley, composed at the gulf of Naples, which ends with these words : "I am one whom men love not,—and yet regret !" Bravo ! That's poetry. (The correct title of Shelley's poem is "Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples".)

Didn't Baudelaire read Shelley's *Adonais*, the famous elegy on Keats's death ? Did he not know that the "Ode on Melancholy" was written by Shelley's *Adonais* ? To this and the connected question, what would have been his reaction to such reading, apparently there can be only conjecture but no clear answer. Yet the question cannot be dismissed as frivolous or irrelevant.

Francis Scarfe, in an essay "Baudelaire angliciste?" (*Journées Baudelaire*) *Actes du Colloque*, Bruxelles, 1968, pp. 199-200 observes on the enthusiastic remarks on Shelley's poem that Baudelaire's judgment is not a "value judgment" at all.

- 14 *The Romantic Imagination* (London, 1950), p. 176.
- 15 Edmund Wilson, *The Shores of Light* (London, 1952), p. 183.
- 16 *The Romantic Poets* (London, 1967), p. 192.

## THE CONCEPT OF INDIAN LITERATURE : TODAY

### Unesco Problems

With what arrogance  
The great languages  
Sanskrit, English, French  
Demand of their followers  
Complete obedience.

Yet is our need now  
Of a Grande Maitresse  
Or a working wife ?

—Naomi Mitchison

Looking for a single national identity in a multilingual literary context in a country like India where the great plurality extends from language to other areas of existence (e.g. racial, geographical, religious etc.) is the most natural, if not the most simple challenge to entice a comparatist. But let me assure you, the present writer is not the first one to rush into it, many angels have done so before, the last of them being R.K. Dasgupta. At the FILLM Congress in 1975 he gave us a survey of the previous attempts made by European Indologists to establish a concept of Indian literature as one literature. Like some other emerging nations India also faces this paradox i.e. "the desire to be one and yet remain many", as so aptly expressed by Anne Paolucci, in the context of the multinational literature of Yugoslavia (*C.N.L. Report*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1974).

Lenin, advising against polygamy, warned the world against its worst danger, viz. a multiplicity of mothers-in-law. We, the literature-lovers in India, realize the wide import of this statement, as we are seriously suffering the dire consequences. This multilingualist



nation of ours is irrevocably wedded to seventeen legal wives, viz. seventeen officially recognized national languages and literatures. And the literary historians in each, play the role of formidable mothers-in-law. They are dedicated custodians of the single literatures, each working hard to enhance the position of her own ward. The situation is complex and tragic. In order to bring about a balance of power among the literatures, we urgently need to discover a working concept of Indian literature as one literature and stop conceiving it as a bunch of multicoloured efflorescence of languages. It was a simple enough task for the early Indologists who could keep themselves busy with Sanskrit alone. For today's Indologist the problem is far greater, since the vernaculars have long reached adulthood and cannot be overlooked any longer.

## I

All Indologists, present or future, must necessarily be competent comparatists, declared or undeclared. Whatever their theory, in practice they must use the tools of Comparative Literature in order to get anywhere with Indian art, literature, or music. Otherwise, they produce such stuff as the following : "Let me start by doubting the contention that Indian literature is one, though written in different languages, and by stating that the contention cannot be sustained in its fullest sense. Literature is language-based."<sup>1</sup> This was the opening bar of the welcome address by the chairman of an all-India seminar on Indian literature. No wonder, at the end of the search, we find the editor of the proceedings lamenting, "contrary to the declared aim," he confesses the seminar failed to see "Indian literature in its totality." And what was his reason for the failure? Because "all the languages were not properly represented."<sup>2</sup> What a pity, Comparative Literature has not yet taken roots in the Indian academic system! How disappointing it is to watch non-comparatists approaching a problem of Comparative Literature from the wrong end! In India literature is placed in the complex context of a multi-cultural and multi-racial socio-historical melange, where without conducting proper reception and influence studies, both international and intra-national, one cannot get an insight into the reality of the Indian situation. Traditional single

literature scholarship can be of little use in a case like this. One must extend one's area of interest not merely beyond one literature, but beyond the area of literature in general, and probe into other areas of human activity and experience. Any serious attempt to establish a concept of Indian literature today must be interdisciplinary. It does not in any way distort the regional identities of the literatures as Henry Remak has said, "Comparative Literature superimposes a viable international perspective on literature seen as a national and personal creation."<sup>3</sup> In the case of India, we shall change the term 'international' for 'national' and 'national' for 'regional'.

The earlier generation of European Indologists were all competent comparatists in practice as R.K. Dagupta has said, though the label was wanting. And as Sujit Mukherji has shown, a Western scholar of Indian literature has a great natural advantage : "as an outsider seeking entry he is compelled to consider the wholeness of Indian literature before he considers the parts."<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, the distance and the wider view should also be available in an anthology of Indian literatures in translation. By wiping out the linguistic distinctions, it helps to create a more general platform, thus emphasizing the underlying unity in form and themes, in imagery and metaphors. It brings to light the Indian sentiment, the Indian writer's general attitude to life and art, by creating an artificially simplified situation. Just as colouring a slide helps to identify basic patterns under the microscope, similarly, the distance forcibly introduced between the literary pieces and the source languages, create a background of objectivity, where the basic literary patterns stand out in an exaggerated simplicity.

Just as the foreign scholar has the advantage of distance and objectivity, the Indian scholar has the opposite advantage of carrying within himself the complex phenomena that Indian literature contains. The multifarious cultural milieu that he is a product of, also produces the literature. If we have *no* problem in identifying ourselves as one Indian people in spite of the multiple differences, then theoretically at least the regional barriers in the case of literature also should not be insuperable. It is not the national flag that gives us our Indianness ; it is not merely an outer label, but a deeper inner reality. This basic Indianness that exists above and in spite of the wide disparity among the regions, races, religions, local customs, class stratifications, etc., is our key to the concept of an Indian

literature. It is not always a fruitful exercise to separate literature from the people, more often than not, it leads to diminishing returns.

Every writer acts within his given socio-historic framework. He is a part of his country's total tradition. The main impacts on the life and mind of the Indian people have been roughly on the same lines in the various regions. Therefore regional literatures reflect parallel influences and tendencies though in varying degrees and periods. This is where the basic identity of the Indian people and the Indian literature lies. Though periodization is an enormous problem no doubt, yet as a literary phenomenon Indian literature is a unit by itself as distinguishable from other literatures of Asia.

## II

There is a common tendency among literary historians to equate the Indian situation with the European, or multinational literature of the Soviet Union, but a deeper look proves the shallowness of the parallelism. At least to a usurper like me, who is by no means a historiographer, the growth patterns of the two cultures seem quite dissimilar. First of all Europe was never under any false impression of being *one nation*, but in India, in spite of its continental size and character, the notion of a uniform national identity, *maha-Bharata* (i.e. great India) has always existed from before the days of the epic (400 B.C.). The Graeco-Roman and the Hebraic-Christian cultural traditions in Europe cannot quite be compared to the Hindu-Buddhistic and Islamic-Christian cultural impact in India. While the dying Graeco-Roman culture was totally replaced by the Judaic-Christian tradition in Europe, in India Hinduism has continued to maintain its position as the major cultural force, withstanding all the foreign impositions of younger cultures. It has not been supplanted but merely supplemented by the later external cultural influences. Hinduism is a living cultural force, a continuum, an unbroken link between India's ancient, medieval and modern history. Partly as a result of this, and mostly for a combination of socio-economic factors, several stages of human history co-exist side by side in India today. In the ancient ruins, and in the temple architecture (a number of these are living halls of worship, not merely archaeological curiosities) one can visualize a bygone period of human civilization, in the sprawling, suffocating cosmopo-

litan cities and five-star hotels, another stage ; in the fast developing industrial towns with rows of chimneys poking into a polluted grey sky, yet another. Now, just step a few miles within the rural areas and you will move several hundred years backwards, as if in a time machine, in an area of hunger and darkness. From the private clubs where heated swimming pools on illuminated terrace gardens have glass floors to provide a suitable ceiling for the dance hall underneath, you are ejected into a world where electricity is a fairy tale and penicillin a black magic, where wild animals still play havoc with human life.

How can the situation of India be comparable to that of Europe ? or the Soviet Union's ? Europe's clocks show roughly the same time in history all over the continent. So does the Soviet Union's. Besides, the Soviet Union is fortunate enough to possess one undisputedly major literature head and shoulder above all others. In India we have 12 major modern literatures no one less than 500 years old and 6 aged over a 1000 years. Where are we to place ourselves ? What does 'today' mean in India ? It is an incredible timespan within which the modern Indian consciousness functions. We live with the ancient, medieval and ultra-modern all within the reach of one another. Value-wise, in an urban middle-class ordinary family, often the medium educated father belongs to the nineteenth century, the uneducated mother and the domestic help to the medieval world, and the Hollywood-educated son is a twenty-first century specimen. Amidst such contradictory forces all working at once, where the formidable time lag is not of generations but of centuries, it may not seem easy to find a common denominator in literature. But what miracles can an ardent comparatist not achieve ? Through fearless 'confrontations' and careful 'discriminations' we can reach our ultimate goal without necessarily becoming an 'overreacher'. Only, 'the context of criticism' in this case must be interliterary as well as interdisciplinary.

### III

Suniti Kumar Chatterji once wrote, "there is a fundamental unity in the literary types, genres, and expressions among all the medieval and modern languages of India ..." although he did not go much further into the investigation of this Indian literary unity. There are two major groups among Indian academics, holding two

contradictory concepts of Indian literature. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Krishna Kripalani and us, the Comparative Literature enthusiasts, think that one can certainly tell Indian literature as a distinctly separable entity from the Chinese or the Middle Eastern. Hence a pan-Indian literary idiom does exist. Niharranjan Ray, Srinivasa Iyenger and the single literature traditionalists oppose this view. The third and the largest group are the uncertain ones, who threaten to thrash it out but evade it when faced with the issue. All the workshops, seminars and symposia have fallen in this last category so far. Nevertheless all groups constantly talk together about the importance of India's national integration. The present writer thinks that a recognizably Indian characteristic can be sorted out if all literatures of India are put through the sieve of thematic analysis. We have all suffered the same famines, fought the same wars, survived the same riots, and other forms of subtler destructions. The pre-colonial (i.e. ancient, classical and medieval) cultures, the colonial impact, and the post-colonial self-seeking can all be seen as a continuous process of development of a whole people, reflected in a whole literature.

We can perhaps consider contemporary Indian literature as the offspring of a marriage between two sharply varying and immensely powerful literary traditions : one ancient and oriental, viz. Sanskrit ; and the other modern and occidental, viz. English. These two sharply varying and in many ways contradictory cultural experiences have given rise to the modern Indian literatures, be it written in an Indo-European, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan, or Austric language. (1a) The long classical heritage from the early religious texts, the epics, the Jātakas and the Purāṇas to the classical Sanskrit literature has given the whole of India a common childhood memory. (1b) The rich living repertoire of folk literature, art and music, and the common experience of medieval Bhakti cult, provide us with an endless fund of common mythology. (2) This is succeeded by the modern period, the colonial and post-colonial common experiences.

However much we might dislike the idea, the fact remains that we came in contact with the modern mind only after and because of the colonial aggression, both on the socio-economic level, and on the intellectual. The impact of course was not equal everywhere. Where the British came first, new ideas and modernity reached earlier. But though the time and the intensity of the impact differed from region to region, it was only a matter of degree. The basic quality of the

change was the same. Since modernity was not a natural indigenous sociological growth, but a forced imposition on the Indian scene, there was partial acceptance and partial resistance among the people all over India. Again, the type of resistance and its intensity vary and the literatures record this diversity. But the general pattern of our reaction was uniform.

Our literature today reflects this pan-Indian tension with the strange combination of destructive as well as constructive forces of colonialism, a new world of an alternative value-system opened up to the traditional Indian mind, along with the loss of freedom and innocence. This caused a threefold tension, social, moral and psychological, all of which is reflected in the literature of the country. First, it was a change forced upon the society by a foreign invader power ; second, there was no real industrial revolution, whatever industrialization took place, remained partial and incomplete ; thirdly, there was never a religious reformation worth its name ; fourthly, while all social changes cause some resistance everywhere in India this meant changing the indigenous values for the foreign, and furthermore, the national for the colonial. Not being the flower of a natural process of cultural growth, sudden modernity sat very uncomfortably indeed on the head of the Indian people. The English educated intelligentsia, i.e. the enlightened urban middle class that create written literature, felt both attracted and repelled by the contradictory aspects of modernity. Hence the confusion of values, the unmitigated tension between extremes, the false new façade over the age-old inner convictions, are all equally shared by contemporary Indian literature all over India. The handful of educated elite everywhere in India are blood-brothers, no matter what their regional backgrounds are. They are a motley group living in the state capitals speaking English to their colleagues and children and mother-tongue to their mother and wife, local language to the domestic servant and Hindi to the shopkeeper. This hotch-potch need not pass for homogeneity, but it is the urban Indian phenomenon today. Hence the 'I' in today's Indian literature, the Indian protagonist both in poetry and in fiction is the familiar frustrated young urban male caught between a multiplicity of worlds, and times, suffering the inevitable consequences of belonging to a transitional society. Any exception only proves the rule.

**The central tension in the vast majority of contemporary Indian**

literature therefore is that of transition from a rural and traditional to an urban and modern situation, expressed either through a romantic nostalgia for the village left behind, or through eager utopian dreams about city-life or through fear and hatred of the cruel, impersonal city. In short it is the sad plight of the individual in a fast-changing social structure. He has a rich traditional background of the Upanishads, the epics, and the Bhagavad-Gītā, supplying him with traditional values and myths whether he likes it or not. English education on the other hand provides him with a set of alternatives, thus complicating the pattern further. There are some specific social phenomena shared by all Indians, like the breakdown of the joint family system and the tragic sentiments that go with it, the nationalist freedom movement, the impact of Gandhi's personality, the partition of India and the great pangs of separation, the breakdown of the rural middle class, the evils of the zamindari system, the evils of the caste system, and untouchability, the problems of rural poverty and urban unemployment, the frustration of the educated unemployed, the general middle class taboo on sex and endless religious superstitions, provide a common bond. One source of richness common to all Indian writers is the exposure to world literature through English. This is where the greatest Western influences, Marx and Freud, and recently, Sartre, come in.

Thus one can safely surmise that linguistic subdivisions and regional colour are less important aspects of Indian literature. The unity lies much deeper in the psyche of the modern Indian man.

#### IV

Literature being the property of the literate, in India it belongs to 30% of the total population. Hence the concept of Indian literature lies today in the concept of the contemporary Indian middle class,—even when he writes on the tribals and the fishermen, it is his urban taste and values that push his pen. The makings of the Indian middle class is what has gone into the makings of Indian literature. The modern Indian writer puts two questions to himself: (a) What is Indian in me? i.e. How can I retain a regional identity yet achieve a national standing?, (b) What is modern in me? i.e. How can I remain traditional, not lose my roots, yet become a citizen of the contemporary world? As a matter of fact Indianness and modern-

ness, are not contradictory terms any longer, though it used to be the case. Now there is a modern Indian mind working as a living force in all aspects of creative expression, in films, in painting, in literature.

Lastly where are we to place (1) those writing in India in an international language and (2) those writing outside India in a modern Indian language ? Well, the evidence of the basic Indian experience expressed even in a language originally not our own (e.g. in English, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Gandhi, Nehru— in Persian, Iqbal), can be Indian literature. But a separate experience even if written down in one of the major Indian languages, can cease to be Indian literature. As an interesting example of this phenomenon we can take the literature of East Pakistan. After Pakistan was born, Bengali literature underwent a partition as well. The new literature of East Pakistan started out on a consciously different note with a deeply Islamic orientation (both in themes and in the use of Arabic and Persian words in Bengali, and also by a careful elimination of things Indian as things Hindu). One can compare the 25 years of East Pakistani literature with the 25 years of post-Independence literature of West Bengal and notice the difference. Although the language is the same the literatures are totally different, like English and American literatures. After Bangladesh came into existence in 1971 the secular strain returned to the literature of East Bengal and a third situation arose. It would be an interesting exercise now to compare the three and see how the changing national identity flowers in three different directions in the same language. If three distinct literatures can grow in the same language, the reverse should also be possible, i.e. one whole literature can grow through a variety of languages. Obviously it is not the language alone but the people's psyche that determines the identity of a literature. But one modest question remains when the identity of a nation changes its outer labels, do the people also change their inner beings so quickly ? One wonders. But this is perhaps a question that is best left unanswered at the moment, even by devoted comparatists.



## NOTES

- 1 Niharranjan Ray, *Proceedings of a National Seminar on Indian Literature*, ed. A.K. Poddar (Simla, 1972).
- 2 *Ibid.*
- 3 "A Comparative History of Literature in European Languages : Progress and Problems", paper submitted to *Synthesis* (Bucharest, 1976).
- 4 *Towards a Literary History of India* (Simla, 1975).
- 5 *Languages and Literatures of Modern India* (Calcutta, 1963).
- 6 Niharranjan Ray, speaking about the idea of modernity and tradition in an Indian Cultural Convention, pointed out once that a man's *shila* (an individual's cultivated qualities) becomes his son's *kula* (i.e. inherited family tradition). That is the key to the Indian cultural experience, its natural tendency is towards homogeneity, in the midst of heterogeneity. It is a culture of aissmilation and not of rebellion. Hinduism has shown a genius for survival by adopting the most attractive qualities of the challenging culture as its own. India's capacity for assimilating an alien influence is so great that she can merge all other spirits in her all-pervasive, all-receptive, spirit of Indianness. "Saka-Hun-dal Pathan-Mughal ek dehe holo lin" : The Sakas, the Huns, the Pathans and the Mughals have all mingled in one body. ("Bharat-Tirtha", Rabindranath Tagore) Yet, need there be two opinions about the possibility of one Indian literature ?

**‘দেশে ফেরার খাতা’ : A Bengali translation of  
Aimé Césaire’s poem, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, by  
Devaleena Ghosh and Manabendra Bandyopadhyay**

André Breton, in his excellent introduction to this great poem, *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, remarks : “Aimé Césaire est avant tout celui qui chante.” This, at first sight, seems a strange pronouncement about what is patently “un poème à sujet”, even “un poème à thèse”. It is true, nevertheless, and has to be kept in mind as a central criterion in estimating the quality of translation. The Bengali version under review has passed this test, for it “sings”, as the original does so supremely. And the same competence is evident in the suppleness of the medium which is absolutely vital in rendering a poem that covers a wide range in tone and style.

Césaire’s mastery of the French language, which was not of his own race, is amazing ; it ranges from the most literary and erudite to the most simple and colloquial. The task of the translator, when confronted with a poem of such richness and variety of expression is difficult and exacting ; this is particularly so when his own language happens to be as remote from that of the original as Bengali is from French. One misses something of the concentration, the grim reticence of the original in the somewhat diffuse Bengali version, but, the emotional charge is there in its full intensity. This last point is of central importance in a poem whose dominant quality is, in the words of André Bréton, “l’intensité exceptionnelle de l’emotion devant le spectacle de la vie”. This intensity is the common denominator running through the rich, complex variety of tones, ranging from the cold irony of hard facts to torrential outbursts of mounting rage. The translators have been able not only to reflect in their Bengali

rendering this diversity but also to sustain this intensity, the 'high seriousness' of a great poem.

In some cases, the translators have added a word or two to render the text clearer to the average Bengali reader. In the sentence, for instance, 'আর তারা তপুলাল লোহার ছাঁকা দিয়ে পথ বানিয়েছে আমাদের', the last phrase 'পথ বানিয়েছে আমাদের' does not occur in the text, which runs : "l'on nous marquait au fer rouge". This is an addition which the translators must have felt—and rightly, I think—necessary for clearer comprehension. (Readers acquainted with the original might prefer to have explicatory extensions of this kind in a separate note and not in the body of the text. But then such readers, if they exist at all, will have little use for a translation.)

An interesting example of the translators' fidelity to the original is the retention of a word or phrase which, for some reason or other, does not appear in the English translation. Snyder's English version of "tam-tams burlesques de trahison tabide", for instance, is "burlesque tomtoms of treason". "Tabide" is an uncommon word ; but that is no reason why it should be dropped. In the Bengali version the word is taken care of in the very first word of the line : 'হাড়জিরাজিরে রাজদ্রোহের হাস্যকর সব মাদলের বোল' (p. 38).

It is, however, impossible, from the very nature of the case, to maintain consistently in Bengali the homogeneity of French, which still remains overwhelmingly Latin in its vocabulary. Even Césaire's French, for all its variety and raciness, has, for this reason, a sustained elegance which is unattainable in Bengali ; hence the juxtaposition of such incongruous words as 'হাড়জিরাজিরে' and 'রাজদ্রোহ'. Though undesirable, it cannot altogether be avoided in Bengali. The best that can be done in such a case is to concentrate on rendering as faithfully as possible the sense of the original, and this is precisely what the translators have sought to do, and rightly.

The French participles, and they abound in Césaire's poem, are the most difficult to translate into Bengali. They are not ready to hand in Bengali as in French, and have to be got up as best as one can. The following line

Au bout du petit matin, flagues perdues, parfums errants,  
ouragans é choués, coques démâtées, vieilles plaies, os  
pourris, buées, volcans enchainés, morts mal racinés, orier  
amer.

becomes in Bengali :

যখন শেষ হ'য়ে আসে ভোর, হারানো ঝরনা, এলোমেলো ছড়ানো গন্ধ, হাঁপিয়ে-মরা  
হারিকেন, মাতুল তোবড়ানো নৌকো, পুরনো সব ঘা, পোকাম-কাটা ছাড়, ঝরা,  
শেকলপরানো আগুনের পাহাড়, শিকড় ওপড়ানো মরণ, ভিত্ত কর্কশ একটানা  
চীংকার। (p. 47)

The translators have made the best of a bad job, and come off better than one should have expected. 'এলোমেলো ছড়ানো' for "arrants", is excellent, and felicities of this kind are not uncommon.

French sentences, especially when they are long, and handled by a master, have a way of withholding the most crucial word till the very end with a powerful dramatic effect. In the Bengali version this effect has been frequently achieved without forcing the normal syntax. Here is an example, with the Bengali version :

Par une inattendue et bienfaisante révolution intérieure,  
j'ignore maintenant mes laideurs repoussantes.

কোন-এক অপ্রত্যাশিত সুমঙ্গল অন্তর্বিপ্লবের ফলে এখন আমি উপেক্ষা করি আমার  
এই বীভৎস কুশ্রীভা। (p. 32)

A particular—and admiring—mention should also be made of the handling of a long French sentence with an intricate structure, which is fairly frequent in Césaire's poem. The corresponding Bengali sentence faithfully reproduces the structure of the original without violence to its natural idiom and movement; and it is not the structure alone that it reflects, but the picture as well, which is always clearly visualized and often rendered with something of the intense vividness of the French original.

*Debiprasad Bhattacharyya*

*Twenty-five Years of Comparative Literature  
in India (1956-1981)*

Although India offers the ideal opportunity for practising Comparative Literature, it is both sad and surprising that Jadavpur has remained the only full-fledged department of Comparative Literature in the whole of India, even after twenty-five years. Such is the diehard effect of the colonial values. Our educational ideals are borrowed from the British, and though the British have ultimately caught up with the times and accepted comparative literature (even started the British Comparative Literature Association), India has chosen to remain behind, wrinkling up its nose at the "newfangled American gimmickry" called Comparative Literature.

When Professor Buddhadeva Bose started the very first department of Comparative Literature in India at the new University of Jadavpur, he had to face an enormous opposition from all quarters, especially from the single literature disciplines. The hostility has continued for years ; it has been looked upon as a freakish department, irresponsibly experimenting with knowledge, on the fringe of the Indian academic scene.

Only recently the situation has changed, since the University Grants Commission at New Delhi finally woke up to the relevance of interdisciplinary studies in a multilingual nation like ours, and started encouraging comparative literature studies all over India. As a result of this recent interest, the Departments of English in some universities like Calcutta and North Bengal have introduced readerships in Comparative Literature, Madurai has started calling its Department of English, the Department of English and Comparative Literature, Bombay University has a Professorship in Comparative Literature (though it has no department of Comparative Literature), Bhopal University is beginning a masters degree programme in

Comparative Literature in the Department of Comparative Languages and Culture, Delhi University has introduced an M. Phil programme in Comparative Indian Literature in the Modern Indian Languages Department, the Departments of English and Bengali in Calcutta University, the Departments of English in Mysore, Sambalpur and North Bengal Universities have included special papers in Comparative Literature, a journal on Comparative Literature and Aesthetics is being published from Orissa, the University of Madras Post-Graduate Centre at Tiruchirapalli has planned a U.G.C. seminar on "Comparative Literature and the theory and practice of translation" in January 1981, "Dhvanyālok", an Institute of Commonwealth Literature in Mysore, is holding an international seminar on influence studies also in January 1981, an institute of Tamil and comparative Indian literature has just taken shape in Madras, a national seminar on Comparative Indian Literature was held in Delhi University some years ago, followed by another national seminar on Comparative Literature at Salwan College in New Delhi, and finally, U.G.C. has formed a Committee on Comparative Literature Studies in India, with Professor Nagendra of (the Department of Hindi) Delhi University as its Chairman, and Professor N. Guha of (the department of Comparative Literature) Jadavpur University as one of the members. When all is said and done, after twenty-five years of comparative literature studies in India, Jadavpur University still remains the only university to award Honours, Masters, M. Phil, and Ph.D. degrees in Comparative Literature in the Indian subcontinent. For more than twenty years Jadavpur University has been producing trained comparatists, who hardly have an opportunity to put their trade into practice, thanks to the lack of general interest in the discipline. To continue a lonely journey in the face of continuous challenge has added a martyr-like halo to the department which is both fortunate and unfortunate for its members. However, things are beginning to look up, a change is visible on the horizon of comparative literature in India, the days of struggle are probably coming to an end.

*The present department*

**Students :** Unlike the first hard years, the department now boasts of a handsome group of nearly 200 students. The department has

expanded in many ways and hopes to expand further after the silver jubilee celebrations in 1981.

*The Journal* : The JJCL will complete its twentieth year in March 1981, although it is slightly behind its schedule at the moment. The delay is purely mechanical caused by the short supply of electricity in Calcutta for the last few years. We hope to make up the delay with our next joint issue.

*The Syllabus* : Owing to the availability of teachers and books the department had so far concentrated on European literatures and Bengali literature only ; but the emphasis is now being shifted and modern Indian literatures other than Bengali are filtering into the syllabus. We are making an all-out effort to avail of whatever opportunities that exist, so that the department can be more rooted to the Indian soil, and less dependent on European material.

*Friends of the department from outside*

Among those who helped to launch the discipline in the earliest days, we fondly remember the late Professors Shashi Bhusan Dasgupta and Srikumar Banerjee, of Calcutta University. We still have beside us Professors Sukumar Sen, Amalendu Bose and Kshudiram Das of Calcutta, C.D. Narasimhaiah of Mysore, R.K. Kaul of Rajasthan and Sisir Kumar Ghose of Visva-Bharati, and many other younger teachers all over the country.

*Creative writers in the department*

The department has a tradition of housing creative writers, starting with the founder-chairman Buddhadeva Bose, an Academy Award-winning Bengali poet of the 'thirties. With him, two other celebrated poets were founder-members of the faculty, Sudhindranath Datta of the 'thirties, and Naresh Guha of the 'forties. In the second year of the department came Alokaranjan Dasgupta, a poet of the 'fifties. The faculty has among its present members three more poets of the 'fifties, Pranabendu Dasgupta, Nabaneeta Dev Sen and Manabendra Bandyopadhyay, who were also among the first five graduate students of the department. Among our earliest students we have been fortunate enough to include four other writers of the 'fifties, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Dibyendu Palit, Deepak Majumdar and Shymal Gangopadhyay, and recently two poets from Bangladesh, Hayat Mahmud and Daud Haidar.

*Colleagues we have lost*

Apart from the deaths of Buddhadeva Bose, Narendranath Bhattacharya and Sudhindranath Datta, the department suffered another enormous loss with the death of David McCutcheon at the age of 42. McCutcheon had already made his mark as a comparatist of great value and was writing a book on the terracotta temples of Bengal. Dr. Alokeranjan Dasgupta left the department to join the Department of Bengali, and moved on to the University of Heidelberg. Dr. Sukumari Bhattacharji left us to join the department of Sanskrit. But they have remain comparatists as can be judged from their work. Father Pierre Fallon and Father Matthew Schillings are two more of our ex-colleagues, practising Comparative Literature outside the department. Father Pierre Fallon who was with us for quite some time, helped us greatly. Here we should remember two old friends, Professors Roderick and Margaret Marshall from New York, who spent a year with us in the second year of the department and helped to create the academic atmosphere of the new discipline. We were sorry to hear of Roderick Marshall's death. Dr. Hrishikesh Bose retired some years ago, but is still in touch with the department. Dr. Pranabranjan Ghosh of Calcutta University was with us for many years as a part-time teacher.

*Weekly Seminars*

The department has had a long tradition of holding weekly general seminars, where students and teachers present academic papers. But we also invite speakers to visit the department. Among our distinguished visitors we have had poets like Stephen Spender, Allen Ginsberg and Amiya Chakravarty, comparatists like W. P. Friederich (North Carolina), Saburo Ota (Tokyo), Peter Dronke (Cambridge), Ursula Dronke (Oxford), Richard Ellmann (Oxford), Leslie Fiedler (U.S.A.), Lothar Lutz (Heidelberg), Dusan Zbavitel (Prague), Edward C. Dimock (Chicago), Jeff Masson (Toronto), and creative writers including Gangadhar Gadgil and Syed Samsul Huq, as well as stage and film directors like Sombhu Mitra, Mrinal Sen, Fritz Benewitz (Weimar), and many others from the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R., the F.D.R. and the G.D.R., Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Latvia, Australia, Japan, Canada and Kenya, Bangladesh, France and England and also from other regions of India. In the two-day



seminar recently celebrating the centenary of Prem Chand, only students were invited to present papers which were highly appreciated by all.

#### *National Seminars*

The department has held two national seminars, one on Yeats, as a part of Yeats's birth centenary celebrations, and one on the approaches to drama. A national seminar on Comparative Indian Literature is planned for 1981, as part of our silver jubilee celebrations and for the inauguration of the Indian Association of Comparative Literature.

#### *Publications and Research Projects*

On this new plan, the department has so far published only three books, one on the development of the Bengali theatre, findings of a project done in collaboration with students and directed by two members of the faculty, Swapan Majumdar and Subir Ray Choudhuri, a Bengali translation of Virgil's Aeneid by two other members of the faculty, Hrishikesh Bose and Robert Antoine, and a collection of essays on Comparative Literature, edited by Naresh Guha. Two new research projects have just been approved by the university, one is on East-West literary relations and another on Third World literature. These projects will also be part of the silver jubilee celebrations.

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#### *Indian Association of Comparative Literature*

We are happy to announce the birth of the Indian Association of Comparative Literature, in September 1980. The association's office is presently located at Jadavpur University, since it houses the only department of Comparative Literature studies in India.

The Indian Association of Comparative Literature has Professor Naresh Guha as its President, Rev. Robert Antoine S.J. and Dr. Amiya Dev as its Vice Presidents, Dr. Nabaneeta Dev Sen (who had been on the ICLA Executive Bureau from 1973 to 1979) as its Secretary, and Subir Rai Choudhuri as its treasurer. The following are the executive committee members: Dr. Pranabendu Dasgupta, Manabendra Bandyopadhyay, Debiprasad Bhattacharyya, Swapan Majumdar, Shuddhashil Bose, Phanindra Kumar Mitra.

All friends of comparative literature in India are invited to join the association. There will be two times of membership : general membership (annual subscription Rs. 50/-) and associated membership (annual subscription Rs. 25/-). Voting right will be restricted to general members only.

We would like to inform our readers of another sister organization founded in Salwan College, Delhi, The Salwan College Comparative Literature Association.



## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

AYYAPPA PANIKER teaches English at Trivandrum University, edits a poetry magazine in Malayalam and is himself a poet in the language. Since *Rama and the Bards*, ROBERT ANTOINE, S. J. has been working on the stylistics of the *Ramayana* which is nearly completed. NARESH GUHA is at the University of Chicago this year on a visiting assignment. The present paper was originally read at a seminar at the University of Mysore. MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE gave a series of three lectures at Jadavpur in 1980 on the Indian novel. She is teaching at the University of Hyderabad now. SUJIT MUKHERJEE works with Orient Longman Ltd. This translation by him is going to be brought out soon in book form. AMY G. STOCK taught English at various places in India including Calcutta University, and now lives in retirement in England. The present paper is a brief version of a talk she gave at Jadavpur in 1980. JOHN FIZER teaches at Rutgers University, U.S.A. His paper is being published as a chapter in a book on literature and philosophy. DURGALAL MATHUR, Indian correspondent to the *Bulletin Baudelairien*, teaches English at the University of Jodhpur. NABANEETA DEV SEN's paper was first read at the opening plenary session of the VIIth I.C.L.A. Congress at Budapest in 1976 and subsequently published in a Hungarian translation in *Neohelikon*, Budapest, in 1977. DEBIPRASAD BHATTACHARYYA teaches Comparative Literature at Jadavpur.

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We would like to apologize sincerely to our readers for the delay in publishing this volume of *JJCL* and for a number of printing errors and stylistic inconsistencies in it.

*Editor*

**NARESH GUHA**

*Assistant Editor*

**AMIYA DEV**

**Swapan Majumdar and Nabaneeta Dev Sen  
have assisted in the preparation of this number.**

*founded by*

**BUDDHADEVA BOSE**

**Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature is an annual publication of the  
Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University.**

**All communications (articles, bibliographical data, notes and other items)  
should be sent to the Editor, Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature,  
Jadavpur University, Calcutta 700 032, India.**

**Price : Rs 15.00 / \$ 3.50**

**Subscriptions should be sent to the Registrar, Jadavpur University,  
Calcutta 700 032, India.**

**Published by Arunkumar Gupta, Registrar, Jadavpur University, and printed by  
Suresh Dutta at Modern Printers, 12 Ulladanga Main Road, Calcutta 700 067.**

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**JADAVPUR JOURNAL  
OF  
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

**VOLUME 16-17**

**1978 & 1979**

**DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE  
JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY • CALCUTTA 700 032**